

**Georgia State University**  
**ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University**

---

English Dissertations

Department of English

---

Spring 5-5-2012

# Storied Subjects: Posthuman Subjectivization Through Narrative in Post-1960 American Print and Televisual Narrative

Julie Hawk

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english\\_diss](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english_diss)

---

## Recommended Citation

Hawk, Julie, "Storied Subjects: Posthuman Subjectivization Through Narrative in Post-1960 American Print and Televisual Narrative." Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2012.  
[https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english\\_diss/82](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english_diss/82)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gsu.edu).

STORIED SUBJECTS: POSTHUMAN SUBJECTIVIZATION THROUGH NARRATIVE IN  
POST-1960 AMERICAN PRINT AND TELEVISUAL NARRATIVE

by

JULIE L. HAWK

Under the Direction of Dr. Christopher Kocela

ABSTRACT

This dissertation theorizes the ramifications of new media forms of narrative on subjectivization by tracing the evolution of the observer through its permutations as second-order observer, witness, director, and narrative agent and demonstrating the various interacting processes involved in the recursive feedback loops between and among, self, world, and story. In this project, I explore novels by contemporary U.S. authors John Barth, Richard Powers, Don DeLillo, and David Foster Wallace, as well as two televisual texts, *Battlestar Galactica* and *Dollhouse*. Drawing from several seemingly disparate theories, I situate my argument in the interstices of systems theory (Luhmann, Clarke), psychoanalysis (Lacan, Butler), media theory (Ellis, Fiske, Buonan-  
no), and posthuman theory (Hayles, Badmington), putting forth a theoretical lens I call posthuman narrative onto-epistemology. The study thus fits into overlapping critical conversations. The

extended treatment of five contemporary American novels situates *Storied Subjects* in conversations surrounding postmodernism and posthumanism as well as conversations surrounding these particular authors. For example, in the first chapter, I argue that the John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* and Richard Powers's *Galatea 2.2* incorporate the observer from systems theory into the narrative frame, catalyzing an ontological and epistemological shift. In the second chapter, I show the ways in which Don DeLillo's novels *White Noise* and *Underworld* demonstrate what John Ellis calls the "witness" ontology as well as the evolution of that ontology into what I call the "director" in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*. In addition, the chapter devoted to televisual texts intervenes in an important, though often marginalized, conversation surrounding the importance of situating televisual narratives in dialogue with print fiction, arguing that we must attend to TV texts if we are to understand the texture of contemporary print fiction, which is saturated with the language of TV. In the final chapter, I explore the development of the "narrative agent" ontology, examining both form and content of the televisual texts *Battlestar Galactica* and *Dollhouse* in order to argue that, once second-order observation reaches a prolonged critical awareness, the observer's observation runs alongside her or his ability to intervene in the narrative, which allows for changing the story itself.

INDEX WORDS: Posthuman, Subjectivization, Narrative, Ontology, Epistemology, Observation, Systems theory, Second-Order Observation

STORIED SUBJECTS: POSTHUMAN SUBJECTIVIZATION THROUGH NARRATIVE IN  
POST-1960 AMERICAN PRINT AND TELEVISUAL NARRATIVE

by

JULIE L. HAWK

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2012

Copyright by  
Julie Lollar Hawk  
2012

STORIED SUBJECTS: POSTHUMAN SUBJECTIVIZATION THROUGH NARRATIVE IN  
POST-1960 AMERICAN PRINT AND TELEVISUAL NARRATIVE

by

JULIE L. HAWK

Committee Chair: Dr. Christopher Kocela

Committee: Dr. Martha Singer

Dr. Nancy Chase

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2012

## **DEDICATION**

*For my mom*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing is a kind of hard work that requires a strong support system, and I've been very lucky in that regard. From friends to colleagues to family to four-legged companions to readers of my work, my support system pretty much rocks. First, I would like to thank all my committee members, Marti Singer, Nancy Chase, and especially Chris Kocela. Their careful reading and thoughtful commentary were essential to forming my argument. In addition, the product of my thinking as represented here is a result of many factors, including a foundation of conversational relationships with my colleagues. I cannot name them all, but special gratitude to Vickie Willis, Juliette Kitchens, Casey McCormick, Jim Shimkus, Rahna Carusi, Tony Carusi, Shannon Finck, Amber Estlund, and Danielle Weber for their contributions to the intersecting conversational environments that helped shape my thinking. Most importantly, I would like to thank my family and friends for putting up with me through this process; it couldn't have been easy. Thanks in particular to my mom, dad and siblings, as well as my extended family, for being so supportive and understanding when I had to work through family gatherings. Thanks also to Vickie Willis for always being there to listen to my rants and to Juliette Kitchens for the symbiotic and enriching working vibe we manage to maintain. I cannot state emphatically enough how grateful I am to Damon Hawk for his endless support and love, not to mention making it all worth it. Finally, a warm and fuzzy thanks to all my four-legged friends, especially Malion, Katchoo, Yorick, and Kaya, all of whom gave me exactly the unconditional love and support I needed to get to the finish line.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Primary Texts .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INSCRIBED OBSERVATION: THE RE-ENTRY OF THE</b>	
<b>SECOND-ORDER OBSERVER IN JOHN BARTH’S <i>GILES GOAT-BOY</i> AND</b>	
<b>RICHARD POWERS’S <i>GALATEA 2.2</i> .....</b>	
	<b>33</b>
<b>John Barth .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Richard Powers .....</b>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<b>CHAPTER TWO: THE OBSERVER EVOLVES: FROM “WITNESS” TO</b>	
<b>“DIRECTOR” IN THE WORK OF DON DELILLO AND DAVID FOSTER</b>	
<b>WALLACE.....</b>	
	<b>84</b>
<b>Don DeLillo .....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>David Foster Wallace .....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: CHANGING THE STORY: NARRATIVE AGENCY IN RON</b>	
<b>MOORE'S <i>BATTLESTAR GALACTICA</i> AND JOSS WHEDON'S <i>DOLLHOUSE</i></b>	
<b><i>Battlestar Galactica</i> .....</b>	<b>139</b>
<b><i>Dollhouse</i> .....</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>WORKS CITED.....</b>	Error! Bookmark not defined.

## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation seeks to explore the ways in which narrative functions in a posthuman subjectivization process. An exploration such as this necessitates a methodology that unites several seemingly disparate theoretical frameworks—namely posthumanism (particularly as influenced by systems theory), narrative theories, and theories of the subject. I will call this lens “narrative onto-epistemology.” I examine several post-1960 American fictional narrative texts (broadly defined) with the goal of identifying and explicating the role(s) that narrative plays in posthuman subject formation. I focus on subjectivization rather than subjectivity because the movement—the dynamic change—indeed the feedback loop between self and world—ontology and epistemology—is, I argue, the locus of the posthuman.

The primary texts under examination all at the very least suggest a posthuman world—a world in which, to borrow a phrase from N. Katherine Hayles, we have already become posthuman (*How We Became* xiv). In examining these texts, I hope to highlight the ways in which narrative structures consciousness, particularly posthuman consciousness. I look not only to print fiction, but also to televisual narrative, in order to argue that part of what makes our world posthuman is the interaction among (always becoming) subjects, narrative, and the evolving technologies through which narrative is delivered. Milly Buonanno reminds us that televisual narrative is important because “[n]o other narrative system of the present or the past has ever involved audiences of tens of millions of people, like those who tune in daily to the stories told by the televisual ‘super-narrator’” (72). Indeed, televisual media has permeated culture enough to threaten the viability of print fiction (Green, Fitzpatrick). Despite the fact that these two vehicles for narrative delivery are seemingly quite disparate, I will argue that they each represent different but related aspects of the narrative nature of subjectivization in a posthuman age. Stories are re-

quired not just to give a trajectory to our constructed ontology, but also to provide a template of how to relate to other elements in our environment: other systems, other people, other systems of people.

## **Methodology**

### *Posthumanism*

Posthumanism, in popular parlance, typically connotes the merging of human and machine; however, as Bruce Clarke argues, “[t]he posthuman is something more precise than a mash-up of the human and the mechanical” (19). Indeed, the popular and the theoretical ideas of the posthuman seem, at times, at odds with one another. As Myra J. Seaman argues, “[t]he theoretical posthumanist conception of ‘person or identity as malleable representation or construct’ is adamantly refused by popular posthumanism: the forms of our person may change, but identity—typically expressed in terms of ‘sensation, emotion, and reasoning’—persist” (249). For N. Katherine Hayles, becoming posthuman means “envisioning humans as [embodied] information-processing machines” (*How We Became* 246). Neil Badmington suggests that posthumanism is a working through of humanism, a sort of dialogue between the failures of humanism and the possibilities of something other (“Pod Almighty” 5-7). In short, there is no consensus regarding the definition of posthumanism, but most theorists agree that, as a theoretical construct, posthumanism furthers the decentralization of the human and the eradication of the widespread devotion to the Cartesian liberal human subject—a project long already underway, and suggests the possibilities of both something other than human and something more than human.

For my purposes, the crucial components of posthumanism descend directly from Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory. Posthumanism, particularly as it is informed by systems theory, provides a theoretical framework that allows for a specific focus on process rather than product,

change rather than stasis. It also provides a perspective on the role of the observer—particularly second order observation—that enlightens the self-conscious narratives under investigation.

That is, the figure of the observer observing him, her or itself observing is one that haunts these narratives—whether we conceive of the observer as one of the characters in, the author of, or the recipient of the narrative. Although Luhmann’s theory of systems dispenses with the concept of the subject altogether, replacing it with the “concept of self-referential systems,” the subject is not so easily discarded (28). Regardless of the historical and theoretical vicissitudes of the subject, we still cling to its existence in theoretical discourse, even if that existence is a fragmentary or split one. While Luhmann himself, then, might disagree with my methodology, I find it useful to apply a systems theoretical framework to my discussion of the process of subjectivization.

One of the crucial warrants of my argument is that posthumanism implies dynamism, movement. This being the case, we must turn some attention to analyzing processes in addition to products. The label itself, like its close relative, postmodernism, implies movement. Badmington emphasizes the fact that the post- and the thing being posted are always in a dialogue, in a cycle or feedback loop with one another. For Badmington, the “possibility of posthumanism” is located in that movement: “Meaning keeps on moving . . . Humanism is there and not quite there. It comes and goes, it flickers, it drifts” (“Pod Almighty” 12). Indeed, according to Badmington,

posthumanism is always *becoming*, coming and yet going, and the difference of tense marks a tension, an ongoing questioning. Posthumanism, to borrow a turn of phrase from Ernesto LaClau and Chantal Mouffe, is as much *posthumanist* as it is *posthumanist*. From this perspective, it is not something straightforward, present, instantly graspable. Certainty and mastery—cornerstones, after all, of

humanism—must be surrendered as cultural criticism recognizes that it is not possible to attach labels once and for all to moments, movements, discourses, texts. (“Pod Almighty” 13)

Much as postmodernism is caught up in modernism, then, posthumanism is caught up in humanism. For Badmington, to approach posthumanism is to approach the movement of dialogue about humanism. Seaman reinforces the emphasis on movement, arguing that “[p]osthumanism rejects the assumed universalism and exceptional *being* of Enlightenment humanism and in its place substitutes mutation, variation and *becoming*” (247, emphasis in original). Posthumanism, to put it another way, emphasizes the becoming over the being, the constructing over the constructed, the change over the equilibrium.<sup>1</sup>

In part, this focus on movement owes a debt to systems theory and cybernetics. As Bruce Clarke puts it in his book on posthuman narratology, “systems theory emphasizes that system maintenance is system evolution” (9). We must be careful, however, about using the term “evolution,” as it implies a linear movement. The movement is actually recursive, more of a feedback loop. And while it may appear to spiral outward into a linear trajectory, that appearance is at least in part a result of the persistence of the Enlightenment narrative of progress, a notion that still drives popular narratives of science and technology. We must not get rigidly boxed into thinking in linear terms, for linear thinking almost always implies a telos. The danger in assum-

---

<sup>1</sup> I should note that my insistence on “becoming” over “being” owes a debt to Deleuzian theory. Consider these passages from Deleuze’s and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*: “To become is not to progress or regress along a series. . . . What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes”; “[B]ecoming is not an evolution, at least not an evolution by descent and filiation”; “Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, ‘appearing,’ being,’ ‘equaling,’ or ‘producing’” (238, 238, 239). These brief examples point to Deleuze’s importance as a kind of background noise—an environment within which the system of this dissertation operates and marks distinctions.

ing a telos is that we move our focus from the change inherent in these processes and to an implied—but not yet reached—end point or product.

### *Narrative*

Theorizing narrative has, it seems, become rather trendy. In the 2008 edition of the annual MLA publication, *The Changing Profession*, James Phelan, editor of the journal *Narrative*, claims that “[t]he narrative turn, the study of the nature and power of story and storytelling, continues to be one of the most significant movements in contemporary thought, influencing work in an ever-growing number of disciplines” (166). The 2011 MLA convention, themed “Narrating Lives,” focused on life writing and autobiography studies, two important and overlapping discursive fields in literary studies. The October 2010 issue of *PMLA*, a special issue on the future of literary criticism, includes an article by a widely known narratologist, Monika Fludernik, entitled “Narratology in the Twenty-First Century: The Cognitive Approach to Narrative.” In it, Fludernik argues that the study of narrative has taken a decidedly cognitive turn. That is, mapping narrative is an activity akin to mapping the brain, and, as such, we can apply theories from cognitive science to narratology in order to understand more deeply how narrative functions within the human brain. This addition to the corpus of literary criticism shows the broadening of parameters being used to discuss narrative and, further, how interrelated narrative has become with self and subjectivity. In her article exploring the six dimensions of narrative, Gabriela Spector-Mersel argues that the ontological and epistemological dimensions of narrative are interconnected. The ontological dimension draws on constructivist and poststructuralist paradigms to “focus on the storied nature of human conduct, maintaining that social reality is primarily a narrative reality” (211). The epistemological dimension, she suggests, maintains “that we understand

ourselves and our world by way of interpretive processes that are subjective and culturally rooted” (212).

I argue that narrative functions as a necessary catalyst to subject formation in at least two ways. First, one’s subjectivity, identity, and sense of self are created by and through narrative. Stories, that is, help make up who we are. This I will call narrative’s ontological impulse. But added to that is the insertion of the self into one’s narrative environment. That is, the larger cultural narratives, be they religious or mythological or simply cultural frameworks that implicitly guide behavior, are the backdrop for one’s subjectivization through “small stories,” to borrow a term from Alexandra Georgakopoulou, who, working within the confines of narrative inquiry and narrative analysis, identifies small stories as those which cover “a gamut of under-represented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to telling, deferrals of telling, and refusals to tell” (123). She explicitly positions them against the Lyotardian grand narrative and aligns them with his “*petit récit*,”<sup>2</sup> arguing that “small stories [as a methodology or an area to be analyzed] is somewhat of an antidote formulation to a longstanding tradition of *big stories*” (123 emphasis in original). Ultimately, she argues that small stories are as important to identity formation as larger narratives and that this approach both allows for and necessitates “a scrutiny of fleeting, contingent, fragmented and multiple selves” (128). This concept helps fill in the gaps left by theories that hinge on grand narratives. I will call his use of small stories to help organize the self the epistemological impulse. That is, our ontological positioning is only part of the equation. We must also operate within the world, engaging the urge to know and to classify and organize what

---

<sup>2</sup> Lyotard advocated for using Wittgensteinian “language games,” characterized by playing by the rules of local knowledges and small stories (*The Postmodern Condition* 10, 27-37).

we know. Moreover, these two trajectories work together in a sort of feedback loop, which, again, I argue, is the locus of a posthuman subjectivization.

The assertion that the self is composed of story or stories is not a new one, but neither is it uncontested. This simple thesis is iterated in several different fields. Known to narrative inquiry and narrative analysis scholars as the “narrative identity thesis,” the argument that self is created in, through, and by stories is still under debate. Galen Strawson does his best to debunk this notion in his article “Against Narrativity,” arguing that neither the descriptive or “psychological Narrative thesis,” nor the normative, or “ethical Narrative thesis” is true, and that many people live full and rich lives without viewing themselves in a narrative way (428). Nevertheless, proponents of the narrative identity theory continue to flourish. In his article, “The narrative negotiation of identity and belonging,” Wolfgang Kraus, a social psychologist specializing in identity development, aims “to show how social psychological identity theory necessarily leads to a deconstructive understanding of narrativity” and to “argue for a performative approach of identity construction” (104). He further argues that the self “must be understood as processed, socially embedded, and readable through the self-stories in which it discursively manifests itself” (106). To get at that, he claims, “we need to analyze the processes (the telling) as well as the relationships (between teller and listener) and the form and content of such self-stories” (106). Georgakopoulou agrees that we should pay attention to not just the stories themselves, but also the telling, retellings, refusals to tell, and deferrals of telling. These processes, she claims, are as crucial to narrative identity as the narrative content itself (126-28). Peter Redman similarly argues that it is crucial to look at the conversation among competing theories in order to understand “the depth of the human material upon which narrative ‘writes’” (41). He focuses on four competing, yet paradoxically complementary theories—Butlerian performativity, the concept of



*suture* (informed by Lacan), Foucauldian sociology of persons, and Graham Dawson's more recent narrative composure. In short, the conversation surrounding the narrative identity thesis is a vibrant one.<sup>3</sup>

### *Ontology*

Redman's incorporation of Butler and Lacan into his discussion points to the importance of narrative in psychoanalytic accounts of subject formation. Freud and Lacan base a sizable portion of their theories on the Oedipal myth.<sup>4</sup> I am arguing that what matters for our discussion here is the part of the formulation that too often is ignored. That is, it is not the Oedipus myth that matters as such; rather it is the fact that it is a myth, a story.<sup>5</sup> The Oedipal myth is not the only one around which subjects can and do form—a simple fact that both Freud and Lacan seem to miss. But they were right to point to the importance of myth. In his essay, "On Freud's 'Trieb,'" Lacan says, "The drives are our myths, said Freud. This must not be understood as a reference to the unreal. For it is the real that the drives mythify, as myths usually do" (723-24). The role of narrative in subject formation remains important to later psychoanalytic thinkers. According to Judith Butler, the subject is the narrative that we construct for ourselves. Following Foucault (himself following Althusser), Butler argues that we come to be as subjects because we live in a world wherein there exist, prior to our arrival, discursive and material structures of power. We are made subjects by the very processes through which we are made subject to these

---

<sup>3</sup> For more on the narrative identity thesis, see Paul John Eakin, Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, and Stephanie Taylor.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Lacan criticizes those who look away from the Oedipus complex. He says of a feminist rival, "She would have done better to put her trust in the reason why Freud here again stubbornly insists on reference to the Oedipus complex" ("On a Question" 456). Such a dismissal highlights Lacan's problematic insistence on the content rather than the mechanism of the Oedipal myth.

<sup>5</sup> Here, I am following Jean Baudrillard, who argues that "[a] myth *recounts* something: not so much in the content as in the form of its discourse" (151 emphasis in original).

power vectors. But what one comes to know as one's self is not the whole story. In fact, what one does not (consciously) know always lurks in the margins of the self-story as a "lost object [that] continues to haunt and inhabit the ego as one of its constitutive identifications" (Butler 134). According to Butler, the psyche is not the subject, but rather the remainder of what cannot be reconciled in the process of subjectivation.<sup>6</sup> The psychic remainder, then, exceeds discursive limits, includes the unconscious, and resists the normalizing forces that discipline humans to conformity to a model (Butler 86). Butler asserts that "[t]he account of subject formation is thus a double fiction at cross-purposes with itself, repeatedly symptomatizing what resists narration" (124). The subject, by this account, is only part of the story; the psychic remainder, that which does not fit neatly into the self-story, intrudes upon consciousness, insisting that it be acknowledged.

Slavoj Žižek conceptualizes this psychic remainder in slightly different terms, arguing that "there is always a hard kernel, a leftover which persists and cannot be reduced to a universal play of illusory mirroring" (47). This kernel is not just hard; it is traumatic. In individual psychic systems (people), the traumatic kernel is something akin to an essence that threads throughout someone's chronological journey. In larger systems (social systems, for example), the traumatic kernel would be proportionally larger. According to Žižek, our attempts to represent the phenomenon of concentration camps are "so many attempts to elude the fact that we are dealing here with the 'real' of our civilization which returns as the same traumatic kernel in all social systems" (50). The chaos we feel internally echoes through social systems as well. In my examination of the print texts in chapters one and two and the televisual narrative texts in chapter three, I will show the ways in which the 'real' of our cultural lives resurfaces, intrudes into the con-

---

<sup>6</sup> Butler uses the term "subjectivation" rather than "subjectivization."

sciousness of characters (and readers), insisting acknowledgment and demanding to be worked through, in the Freudian sense. That is, the narrative texts and their processes of production and dissemination speak to the chaotic cultural unconscious that underpins the contemporary era.

Informed in part by psychoanalytic theories, Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial take on subjectivization also relies heavily on narrative. Bhabha highlights the feedback loop between narrative and lived experience, arguing that the subject is contingent upon the continued negotiation of narrative control; indeed, the wrestling for narrative control, the movement of such a negotiation, is where the subject forms. More than being caught up in narrative, then, the subject is caught up in the *narrating*: "The subject is graspable only in the passage between telling/told, between 'there' and 'somewhere else,' and in this double scene the very condition of cultural knowledge is the alienation of the subject" (215). Bhabha also highlights the importance of temporal movement, arguing that "[t]he individuation of the agent occurs in a moment of displacement" (265). The temporal pulsion—a "split-second movement" (265)—creates an effect of being off sides (*abseits*), being beside oneself. This moment, for Bhabha, is the moment of the subject's individuation. He says, "When the sign ceases the synchronous flow of the symbol, it also seizes the power to elaborate—through the time-lag—new and hybrid agencies and articulations. This is the moment for revisions" (275). Bhabha's formulation highlights a "third space" that allows for individuation based on revisions of identity. Displacement creates the ability to negotiate one's identity based on the sort of push and pull of the signifier and the signified. The self-story, then, is always being written. Revisions are an expected part of the process. The revisions, first written in the margins and then incorporated into the text, so to speak, spiral the self outward into the world. By virtue of the interactions between and among self, story, and world,

the story of the self moves outward, incorporating revisions that arise from interactions with the world and engagement of the epistemological impulse.

Finally, the role narrative in subjectivization is crucial in theories informed by cognitive science, ranging from cognitive science proper to cognitive narratologies. The construction of stories is, as the cognitivists see it, necessary for human survival and central to human experience; stories account for and help explain the role of emotion in our identity construction. Kay Young's and Jeffrey L. Saver's collaboratively written article, "The Neurology of Narrative," combines narratology and neurology. Young and Saver argue that "narrative is a necessary feature of human development" (73); that to be without stories is "like being without a self" (74); and that "to be without one's stories is to be without knowledge of one's life" (74). Marie-Laure Ryan claims that "[f]or the cognitivist approach, 'narrative' is not an artifice, it is the only way, should we say the *natural* way for the mind to represent (or configure, as Paul Ricoeur would say) action, desire, change, being in the world, and the temporality of human existence" (*Avatars* 50). Ryan disagrees with the cognitivist approach, which she categorizes as "panfictionality." She points to Roland Barthes's suggestion "that every discourse that uses narrative inherits the fictionality at its origin," a premise with which she disagrees, saying that "fictionality may be inherent to language, but it is above all an effect of the artificiality of narrative representation" (*Avatars* 48). In short, Ryan rejects a "cognitively based definition of narrative that claims the fundamentally narrative nature of thought," while still maintaining the overwhelming importance of narrative to ontology (*Avatars* 11). On multiple fronts, then, narrative's role in subjectivization is highlighted and at times perhaps problematically privileged over other ways of subjectivizing. With the understanding of how narrative helps us self-situate, I turn now to the outward manifestation of narrative impulses, or the epistemological impulse.

## *Epistemology*

I characterize the outward trajectory of narrative as an epistemological impulse. By this I mean the drive to know, the drive to collect and organize information, to make sense of the world. This drive spirals outward from self to world, from system to environment. To make this argument, I will once again turn to Niklas Luhmann, whose injunction to view systems as distinct from their environments, even while being able to communicate with that environment, is crucial to our understanding of the two impulses or trajectories. Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* argues that the postmodern crisis of narratives unfolds in two ways. The larger crisis, according to Lyotard, is "incredulity towards meta-narratives" (xxiv), which amounts to a cultural reluctance to embrace grand theories that attempt to explain the world, the self, etc. Grand narratives tend to situate themselves in a teleological framework and thereby, at least implicitly, support the notion of human progress. This is a notion that, according to Lyotard, is simply untenable in postmodernity. The second, perhaps smaller, crisis of narratives is the relationship of narrative to knowledge production. Lyotard offers an extended discussion of the two primary systems of knowledge-making: narrative and scientific (or empirical). Neither, he argues, should be equated with knowledge as such, but rather they both serve as ways of approaching knowledge. In the age of postmodernity, empirical, scientific knowledge-making is privileged and is itself both scornful of and dependent upon narrative knowledge production. That is, empiricism scorns narrative knowledge based on its own internal criteria; narrative is invalid because it is not empirical. Leaving aside this logical fallacy on the part of empiricism, empirical knowledge also *needs* narrative in order to be accepted by the wider culture. Scientific knowledge must be presented in narrative form in order to become knowledge at all.

Lyotard's distinction between meta-narrative as a way of organizing our *world view* and smaller narratives as a way of ordering our *world* recurs in scholarship in widely varying disciplines, all with their own taxonomy and nomenclature (narrative inquiry and narrative analysis, media theory, narratology, and cognitive science, to name a few). Gabriela Spector-Mersel argues that the epistemological dimension of the narrative turn situates the narrative paradigm as a way of knowing, a way of organizing experience (212). Milly Buonanno argues that "[n]arrative structuring is the indispensable tool for giving order and meaning to the flow of events that would otherwise be chaotic, and cognitively and emotionally out of control[ . . . ]Narrative structuring has constituted and still constitutes a collective resource for mankind" (72). David Herman, taking a firm cognitive narratological approach and arguing that narrative is "a resource for closure," insists that

[s]tories organize experience by enabling people to select from among the total set of sequentially and concurrently available inputs; preprocess those inputs into internally differentiated chunks with . . . a beginning, middle, and end; and then use those temporally structured segments as a basis for further cognitive operations on new experiential inputs. ("Stories as a Tool" 173)

Elsewhere, Herman asserts that narrative "furnishes a forgiving, flexible cognitive frame for constructing, communicating, and reconstructing mentally projected worlds—the only worlds, arguably, that any of us can ever know" (*Story Logic* 49). While the precise mechanisms at work within epistemological function of narrative are still under debate, scholars agree that narrative is enormously important to making sense of the world. I argue that ontological and epistemological functions of narrative are driven by the various feedback loops in which narrative is caught.

### *Recursivity*

To highlight the various feedback loops through which narrative circulates, I turn now to a brief examination of the appropriation of systems theoretical ideas by other theoretical frameworks, particularly narratology and psychoanalysis. Bruce Clarke argues that rearticulating narrative theories through second-order systems concepts, borrowed from neocybernetic theory, “recuperates their residual humanisms for a posthumanist narratology that factors narrative communications into the wider complex of social and psychic functions” (7). He defines narrative thus:

Narrative is a primary formal and thematic program running on the complex infrastructures of social and psychic systems. The medium of narrative in society is the network of metabiotic meaning systems and their media environments. The maintenance-in-being of narratives in any textual medium has to be continuously reconstructed within social systems that can use them as elements of communicative exchange. Over time these contingencies ensure the continuous transformation of narratives and, from fictions of metamorphosis to histories of social evolution, the continuous recreation of narratives of transformation. (13)

That is, the construction of human and posthuman beings follows an evolutionary path that runs parallel to, and interacts with, the evolution of the way we tell stories and the way we think about the way we tell stories. Indeed, rearticulating the boundaries of the human echoes and is echoed by the rearticulation of the way we tell stories. Narrative, then, is one among many interacting societal systems. Clarke argues that “[s]ystems have tales to tell because they have to tell tales—literally, they must sequentially select and connect the elements of a medium in a continuously viable way—to keep going” (7). In other words, narrative is a byproduct of systems interacting over time. The longer the time span, the more stories proliferate. He further argues that

“[n]arratives go nowhere and do nothing until they enter and circulate as communicative proposals within social systems” (23). Narratives, then, depend on social systems to circulate, and social systems depend on narratives to circulate meaning.

Second-order observation, a basic tenet of systems theory, plays a crucial role in the epistemological trajectory of subjectivizing through narrative. In systems theoretical terms, second order observation refers to the notion of the observer observing him/her/itself observing. Indeed, the observer ontology feeds into and is in turn fed by the epistemology that results from second order observation. Elisabeth Bronfen and Benjamin Marius Schmidt argue that “[t]he subject, as it is conceived in psychoanalysis, is neither purely psychic nor purely social, but rather takes place in an interplay between the registers of the (un)conscious and communication, evoking the notion of an ‘interpenetration’ between the psychic and the social system as put forward by systems theory” (4). Further, though the observer can observe him/her/itself, according to Bronfen and Schmidt, “that which it observes is no longer itself” because the act of observing intervenes (7). They contend that “an important gesture common to both psychoanalysis and systems theory points toward the fact that what any attempt at observing the world/the real will see is ultimately itself—and vice versa, that what any attempt to observe the self will ultimately come up against is the world/the real” (10). Jonathan Elmer connects being to knowing, articulating what he calls a “hypo-epistemological position” (108). This position allows for, he argues, the reinstating of “the figure of man in the place of his erasure” (109). That is, the observer can place a re-inscribed version of him/her/itself in the very blind spot that obscures, ultimately, the observer’s near-totalizing gaze. A fuller elaboration of this concept underpins the discussion of John Barth and Richard Powers in chapter one, but for now I will simply point to N. Katherine Hayles’s contention that Luhmann’s decision to make the observer the origin was his singular



innovation to Systems Theory, an innovation which in turn allows for looking at narrativity alongside systems theory: “When Niklas Luhmann makes the move of turning the construction of the observer *into an origin*, he departs from the circularity of autopoiesis and begins a new cycle in the seriated pattern of overlapping innovation and replication that lies at the heart of my narrative” (94-95). Hayles implicitly points to a spiral here, arguing that Luhmann’s intervention breaks systems theory out of its circularity. The system is still recursive, but the feedback loops result in a spiral outward rather than endless tautology.

As Clarke puts it, “[t]he only ground for epistemology is one that is constructed on the fly at the location of, and from moment to moment by, the present operations of observing systems as they observe each other observing” (6). At first pass, then, second-order observation seems to be merely one more step in awareness, one more remove that allows for a more totalizing gaze. Clarke highlights this aspect of second order observation, arguing that “cognition also undergoes a posthuman metamorphosis. ‘Subjects’ and objects,’ observers and the things observed, are cocreating products of self-referential processes” (6). Further, this “alienation of focalization,” he contends, creates a cosmic perspective (36). Despite this focus, Clarke reminds us that we should not be lulled into thinking that what looks like a totalizing gaze actually is a totalizing gaze. This problematic between the desire for a totalizing gaze, and even a step towards it, and the fact that a totalizing gaze is impossible is manifest in the *telling* of the narrative in the texts under examination. That is, the heightened awareness of the narrative itself, that postmodern trademark, is reflective of the centrality of the observer role in subjectivization through narrative. To put it another way, the various narrative artifices in the texts under examination here serve to add another level to, and another step in the process of, subjectivization through narrative. This concept will be fully developed in chapter one, but I will here offer a

quick example: when Barth inscribes himself into his text as “J.B.,” or Powers as “Richard Powers,” they are doing more than merely writing metafiction. They are, rather, embodying (linguistically) the re-inscription, the re-entry into the system of the second order observer. Even so, though, “J.B.” is not John Barth, and “Richard Powers” is not Richard Powers. Nina Ort points out that “[p]erhaps one could say we operate *as if* (in a psychoanalytic sense) we could observe from an external position, but only retrospectively will we be able to observe what we have done. [. . .] There is no metaposition” (42). While we cannot see from a metaposition, then, we do have an *as if* version of the metaposition from which to theorize in these texts that re-inscribe the second-order observer.

It is important not to get tempted into seeing only the totalizing possibilities, for by doing so we miss the crucial aspect of the observer being caught up in that being observed. Katherine Hayles distills the complexity of second order observation nicely: “As a particular kind of autopoietic unity capable of becoming an observer, the observer-system can generate representations of its own interactions. When the system recursively interacts with these representations, it becomes an observer” (*How We Became* 143). Again, while the motion might look circular, it actually spirals outward, by virtue of the feedback loops between different elements of the system and the system and its environment, still recursive, but not tautological. Indeed, in cybernetics theory, the observer is not someone or something in a position to see objectively, nor yet even subjectively, but rather, relativistically. The observer, that is, is always caught up in the system being observed, and it is precisely this relationship that allows the observer to make representations of the system being observed (*How We Became* 143-44).

Observation creates change in a system, for the marking of a difference inscribes that difference into the system. Self-aware observation creates still more change, for that repetition with

a difference (awareness) creates a revised copy, so to speak, of the observer observing. The effects of second order observation manifest both epistemologically and ontologically. Indeed, observation is caught up in, and crucial to, the process of subjectivization, although to make this connection, we must turn for a moment from one post (-humanism) to another (-colonialism)<sup>7</sup> to examine Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the importance of the observer in the process of coming to be as a subject:

The significance of this narrative splitting of the subject of identification is borne out in Lévi-Strauss's description of the ethnographic act. The ethnographic demands that the observer himself is a part of his observation, and this requires that his field of knowledge—the total social fact—must be appropriated from the outside . . . [T]he subject has to split itself into object and subject in the process of identifying its field of knowledge. (215)

Bhabha's description of this part of the process of subjectivization highlights the interdependence—based on the feedback loop—of ontology and epistemology, particularly as it applies to the observer. As subject, in other words, the observer positions itself ontologically, but this is only possible by seeing him/her/itself as object, thereby positioning itself epistemologically.

The system, then, is an autopoietic one, operationally closed and self-reproducing. The importance of difference to systems theory echoes a variety of other theories, several of which come into play in terms of shedding light on our notion of narrative onto-epistemology. Elisabeth Bronfen and Benjamin Marius Schmidt connect systems theory to psychoanalysis, particu-

---

<sup>7</sup> Part of what I hope becomes clear in this dissertation, albeit implicitly, is the understanding that the prefix “post” does not signify the obsolescence or death of that which is “post-”ed. It is, rather, a signifier of a critical *awareness* of that which is being “post-”ed. That is, “post-” signifies the second order observer's re-entry.

larly as formulated by Lacan, arguing that this notion of absolute distinction via “cutting” is “[a] reformulation of the theory of castration” (4). Further, they point to the similarities of process in both Lacan’s and Luhmann’s formulations of the interplay of system (or subject) and environment via communication as well as the split that occurs as a result of both this reliance on communication and of the figure of the observer. They continue:

If psychoanalysis works with the premise that the subject comes into being in the process of subjecting itself to the symbolic codes within which it finds itself placed, this seems to suggest the idea that the identity of the psychic system to itself is formed in a detour via communication. The subject, as it is conceived in psychoanalysis, is neither purely psychic nor purely social, but rather takes place in an interplay between the registers of the (un)conscious and communication, evoking the notion of an ‘interpenetration’ between the psychic and the social system as put forward by systems theory. Within this mode of thinking, the process of communication is conceived as an autopoietic system in which the elements constitute and reproduce each other: Communication is external to the psyche. (4)

The subject is itself, by this logic, only locatable in the *interplay* between the ontological impulse and the epistemological impulse. Finally Bronfen and Schmidt remind us of one important similarity between psychoanalysis and systems theory—namely that “in both cases something eludes the construction of the subject” (5). For Freud, the repressed materials incessantly haunt the subject, “rendering visible those aspects of the psyche left untouched by dictates external to it” (Bronfen and Schmidt 5). In systems theoretical terms, they argue, “[s]ince a total inclusion of a psychic system is not possible, it [the psychic system] will always find itself partially excluded by communication” (Bronfen and Schmidt 5). The subject, whether conceptualized through psy-

choanalytical terms or systems theoretical terms, is never whole; there is always something missing. Similar to Žižek's "traumatic kernel" or Butler's "psychic remainder," then, the psyche of systems theory, never able to communicate fully, must always be incomplete.

Indeed, systems theory and psychoanalysis share a critical reliance on marking distinctions. Nina Ort argues that "[t]he split of the subject is but the psychoanalytic equivalent to the systems theoretical binary of system and environment. The central void (the gap) is not just 'nothing.' It has the status of the 'lost object'" (38). The perceived "nothingness," that is, resonates in its nothingness such that it has a presence by virtue of its absence. The absence, in other words, is itself a presence. Ort also explores the productivity inherent in second order observation, arguing that, "[s]elf-description thus also means self-production" (39). Complicating this process, however, is the fact that, for systems theory, the psyche is inaccessible in two ways. It is inaccessible to communication and to itself due to its status as an autopoietic system in which its operations "work blindly" (Bronfen and Schmidt 6). This inaccessibility of psyche to itself is due to the blindness inherent to observation and the consequent "belatedness of any systems operation" (Bronfen and Schmidt 6). In short, Bronfen and Schmidt argue that in order for the psyche to see itself, "it has to make use of distinctions offered by the social system, which is to say, it has to take the detour via communication. It will thus be able to observe itself, but that which it observes is no longer itself" (7). The observer re-enters the system, but not as before because the process of observation creates a difference within the observer just as surely as it does within the system itself.

*Medium*

When examining the process of narrative formation and transmission, we must not overlook medium, which does matter. By this I do not simply mean the vehicle of delivery of the story, though that is most certainly part of it. I also mean simply the *awareness* of medium as an important factor. So, print fiction that deals with matters of televisual media needs to be considered as well as televisual media itself. Milly Buonanno argues that different forms of media are not substitutive but complementary. That is, we should not think of televisual media as something that *replaces* print media, but rather something that runs alongside and interacts with print media. Jeremy Green argues that those who insist that the novel is giving way to televisual media see this crisis as an extension of the more general crisis of the subject: “reading is the index of a particular social, cultural, and psychic order” (47). Reading, for these elegists of the novel, is perhaps the last place “where the self is isolated from and inoculated against the insidious power of contemporary culture” (49). Green disagrees with this pessimistic position, arguing that “the distinctive achievement of the late postmodern novel—what makes it worth reading now—lies in the way it engages with the semiotic density of the mediascape, the sign and image saturated spaces that increasingly shape public and private consciousness” (212). With Green, I argue that the contemporary novel does some of its best work engaging with new media. I further argue that the relationship between the novel and new media is not a one way street. Rather, the different forms of storytelling feed each other, and our relationship to both “traditional” ways of getting our narrative fix and newer, more technologically advanced ways of getting that fix in large part shapes our identities, our selves. With this fact in mind, in what follows, I will examine print fiction that engages televisual narrative and some televisual narrative itself.

## Primary Texts

In chapter one, I further establish the systems-theoretical concepts that foreground this approach, particularly as articulated by Niklas Luhmann, in order to argue that both John Barth (in *Giles Goat-Boy*) and Richard Powers (in *Galatea 2.2*), exhibit the importance of second-order observation, particularly of an observer re-entering the (narrative) system being observed. Quentin D. Miller points out the line of descent between the two novels, arguing that Richard Powers's "*Galatea 2.2* follow[s] the lead of John Barth's 1966 novel *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966), where the competition between humans and computers has its roots in the division between science and the arts and humanities" (382). Miller is right to point to the connection between the two novels, but I argue that the competition between human and computer, between humanism and posthumanism, is not the point of either of these books. Rather, both novels highlight the *interdependence* of the human and the posthuman. I argue that the observer's interpellation into the story is central to a posthuman understanding of narrative onto-epistemology. Both Barth and Powers write themselves into the story as characters—Barth as "J.B." and Powers as "Richard Powers." Such an inscription into the story signals a shift in the way we imagine ourselves interfacing with the world, particularly with regard to our relation to (and within) narrative(s). That is, an ontological and epistemological shift takes place when the figure of the observer is called into the story itself. Operating along the lines of system re-entry and interpenetration, the observer becomes a participating observer and an observing participant. If we think of an author as an observer, then the author's interpellation into the story is second-order observation *par excellence*. Through the processes of observation and re-entry, the observer becomes a character, who then becomes a character-observer. The dual role catalyzes an ontological shift, a shift that I suggest is distinctly posthuman, and which is reflected in both form and content.

Very little critical attention has been given to *Giles Goat-Boy* in the past thirty years, and as such most of the existing scholarship is structuralist in approach. Most critics focus on the generic conventions of the text, highlighting its falling in line with the tradition of Menippean satire or as well as reflecting elements of both comedy and tragedy (Bowen, Harris, Walkiewicz, Walter). I argue that *Giles Goat-Boy* exemplifies the process of finding oneself in a larger narrative environment and then tweaking the self to fit that narrative, or using the narrative to make the self. George, the hybrid son of a human and a computer and raised among goats, models his subjectivity after hero tales. Approaching history as story, George frames his entire world through narrative parameters. For example, when he reads the encyclopedia, he prefaces each entry with “Once upon a time” (117). More specifically, he sees himself as a character in a story. Indeed, he sees himself as a potential character in several stories, believing that “there would be other roles in other realms, an endless succession of names and natures” (117). Early in the narrative, Max, George’s surrogate father, says to him, “Who you are, nobody knows: not me, not George [a different character named George], not anybody. But *what* you are—that’s what you get to hear now. It’s the *history* you got to understand” (85). George’s very identity is tied up not just in his history, the story of his conception, birth, and life, but also in the *telling* of that story. The narrative itself is ostensibly told through George’s perspective, but we are told in the “editor’s preface” that the narrative is actually a computer simulation of George’s authorial voice based on the stories on the computer’s hard drive of George’s life. The narrative perspective itself, then, reflects the posthuman haunting of the subject.

The scholarship surrounding *Galatea 2.2* consistently debates to what extent this text is posthuman. N. Katherine Hayles posits that *Galatea 2.2* is quintessentially posthuman—a novel that does not overlook the importance of embodiment. Joseph Tabbi also highlights the posthu-



man aspects of the text, taking a systems theoretical approach and underscoring the role of second-order observation as a tool to “reengage” literary discourse (72). Other critics are not so ready to concede that Powers has here written a posthuman text. Jon Adams argues that the word “posthuman” itself is “a superfluous neologism” (142), whereas Miller and Matt Silva argue that while the novel addresses posthumanism, Powers essentially falls back on a re-entrenchment of humanism. Most of the critical conversation surrounding the posthuman in this novel centers on the AI, Implementation H, or Helen. My argument, however, will focus on the posthuman aspects of the character Richard Powers, a point taken up by Joseph Tabbi, whose focus on second-order observation addresses Richard Powers as author and character. I expand on Tabbi’s argument by focusing more explicitly on the feedback loop between Richard (“human”) and Helen (“posthuman”), arguing that neither of those designations are accurate, but rather that it is in the interaction between Richard and Helen that the posthuman is born.

In *Galatea 2.2*, Richard Powers (the author) constructs a posthuman subjectivization process that develops by, in, and through narrative. Helen, the Artificial Intelligence (AI) designed to take a Turing test against a (human) Master’s candidate in literature, must “read” and “think about” a vast number of stories in order for her to become a (simulation of a) conscious being. Richard Powers (the character), too, comes to be as a subject through stories—the ones narrated to him and the ones he tells. Bringing together the seemingly disparate fields of cybernetics, narratology, cognitive science, and psychoanalysis, I argue that it is precisely through this interaction of narrative and cognitive processes, both human and artificial, that the posthuman is born. That is, the fact that an AI is attempting to comprehend literature is not the posthuman turn here. Rather, the interaction of Richard Powers (the character *and* the author) with both stories and with what stories tell us about cognition and ontology is the locus of the posthuman in *Gala-*

tea 2.2. Further, the self-referential naming of the protagonist implies that Powers is pondering his own cognitive constructedness as an author (function) and as a conscious character in his own story. Ultimately, then, this section contends that narrative, cognition, and ontology are inextricably linked, and that they function as a complex, interactive system.

Chapter two argues that the ways in which DeLillo and Wallace interrogate the interaction of the “subject” with televisual media, and more importantly the ways that relationship changes, reveal important insights into a posthuman narrative onto-epistemology. Building on the work of John Ellis, John Fiske, and Milly Buonanno, I introduce the “ages of TV” as set forth by Ellis and updated by Buonanno, both of whom structure this taxonomy around distribution methods.<sup>8</sup> I situate the DeLillo novels under examination—*White Noise* (1987) and *Underworld* (1997), in the era of plenty—which is the height of broadcast TV. Ellis argues that with the age of plenty comes a new way of perceiving the world, which he calls “the witness.” The witness is a consciousness so media-saturated that there is nothing s/he can claim not to know: the world is open for constant viewing, but only of what is broadcast. Wallace, on the other hand, situates *Infinite Jest* (1996) in the “era of uncertainty” (Ellis 2000) or the “era of abundance” (Buonanno 2008), creating a new kind of subjectivity, one based on the power (and the problems) of unlimited choice, as he begins to predict the wide-scale transition from broadcasting to narrowcasting. The viewer of “Entertainments” in *Infinite Jest* is able to create her or his own program-

---

<sup>8</sup> According to John Ellis, the “ages” of television are as follows: the age of scarcity, lasting until the late 1970s or early 1980s (depending on geographical location), was characterized by a very limited number of channels. The second era is the age of availability, wherein “the era of scarcity was replaced by managed choice” (ST 61). Narrowcasting, or niche marketing to smaller groups, is a product of the age of availability. The third era Ellis calls the age of uncertainty, as television continues to transform in production and distribution. Milly Buonanno renames this third period the age of abundance to signify the leap in narrowcasting and the inundation of programming, but she cautions us that Ellis’s framework, while helpful, privileges distribution methods. She argues that while the sheer number of programs available is most certainly abundant, the number of “quality” programs (however we might define that) is still relatively scarce (21).

ming, with unlimited choice in content as well as context. The kind of subjectivity Wallace describes, while indebted to Ellis's witness, moves beyond the witness to a subjectivity I call the "director ontology," a positionality characterized by increased levels of choice, no longer subjected to the flow of Broadcast TV. Despite the seemingly positive spin of the director ontology because of its illusory warrant of control and mastery, I highlight the dangers attendant to this positionality, developing John Ellis's notion of choice fatigue as it plays out in *Infinite Jest*.

Looking first at Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and *Underworld*, I will discuss the self's reification through media saturation. In *White Noise*, for example, Jack is "shot through with Babette" not when standing in her physical presence, but rather when he sees her on television (103). Further, Babette herself seems to Jack to come into being through digital representation. He says, "[s]he was shining a light on us, she was coming into being, endlessly being formed and reformed, as the muscles in her face worked at smiling and speaking, as the electronic dots swarmed" (103). Mark Osteen argues that "*White Noise* gains much of its remarkable resonance by compelling us to listen again to the 'noise' of our own popular culture" and that, in his "dialogue with culture," DeLillo acknowledges his own work's "implication in the culture that it critiques" (166-67). David Yetter and John Johnston both explore the influence of film and film technique on DeLillo's work, Yetter pointing to DeLillo's "deep focus cinematography" (28), and Johnston to his "post-cinematic perception" (268). In *Underworld*, the serial murders of the Texas Highway Killer are made possible, the narrator argues, by the presence of television and recording devices: "the serial murder has found its medium, or vice versa" (159). The coverage of the murders on television keeps the killer epistemologically engaged in the event he has already experienced on an ontological level, and the accidental coverage of one of the murders captured by a child with a video camera plays repeatedly on all the major networks.

Surprisingly little critical attention has been given to David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, published in 1996. Most of the critics brave enough to write about this voluminous novel focus on Wallace's criticism and re-appropriation of irony (Goerlandt, Holland, Nichols). Other critics examine the disturbing effect of the novel—both structurally and in terms of content (Cioffi), the role of “serious play” in forming a sense of autonomy (Bresnan), and Wallace's debt to Dostoevsky (Jacobs). Most useful to my own argument, N. Katherine Hayles contends that *Infinite Jest's* discussion of the abject via the ecological disaster, the Entertainment, and the technologies of the self underscore the importance of recursivity, particularly as it applies to subjectivity and environment. My argument intervenes in the critical conversation by closely examining the ways in which Wallace imagines the evolution of the ways in which televisual narrative is consumed and the effects that transition has on human subjectivity.

I argue that *Infinite Jest* reinforces the notion that the media saturation of the contemporary period impacts the formation of a posthuman subject. Published in 1996 and depicting a future that would be taking place roughly now, *Infinite Jest* proves rather prescient in its anticipation of rapidly increasing viewer choice of entertainment. The Broadcast networks have failed, and now all entertainment is run by a monopolistic entity, InterLace. Television no longer operates as something that we turn on and allow to flow over us. Rather, the television and the computer have merged into the teleputer, providing increasing choices for the viewer and more control of that viewing. Such freedom of choice results in, I argue, what John Ellis, in his seminal work on the ages of TV, calls “choice fatigue,” a concept developed to describe the ways in which too much choice negatively impact the ability to choose at all (*ST* 171). Orin Incandenza, one of the main characters, nostalgic about television, claims that he misses the days when television itself dictated to us what we watch. He says, “The choice, see. It ruins it somehow.

With television you were *subjected* to repetition. The familiarity was inflicted. Different now” (600 emphasis in original). The primary haunting of the novel—The Entertainment. Created by James Incandenza, The Entertainment, also entitled *Infinite Jest*, is a cartridge of digital addiction, entertainment so pure, so wired to the pleasure centers of the brain that it renders the viewer de-subjectivized. Wallace’s vision of near-infinite choice of Entertainment resulting in the total removal of subjectivity demonstrates the effects on the deep structures of our ontological positioning, particularly with regard to narrative. These two narrative threads, in particular, point to the problematics of choice and instant gratification with regard to televisual narrative.

Chapter three examines two television narratives, Ron Moore’s *Battlestar Galactica* and Joss Whedon’s *Dollhouse*, arguing that the processes described in chapters two and three, once entering into conscious awareness, result in narrative agency, both ontologically and epistemologically. In other words, the characters described in this chapter exhibit narrative agency in two directions: one process changes the self story, and indeed, this usually happens first, and the other process changes the larger story in which that self is placed, usually by manipulating the small stories. Specifically, I explore the subjectivization of Athena, the Eight Model who is positioned within the text to be our cydon ancestor. In particular, I explore her use of narrative to become as a subject, further situating narrative’s crucial role in our subjectivities as well as the place of technology in narrative and narrative in technology. Similarly, Echo, the protagonist in *Dollhouse*, exemplifies a posthuman narrative onto-epistemology because her subjectivization process, enacted in, through, and by narrative, involves changing the story after finding her place within it. Further, this section argues that the conditions of possibility for these narratives, specifically the collaborative nature of storytelling as is demanded by the division of labor necessary for a television show to be a successful component of the narrative system itself and that this

multi-authored storytelling, in turn, fosters the development of characters who themselves have authorial agency.

The re-imagined sci-fi network television series *Battlestar Galactica* (hereafter *BSG*) deals with some of the “big” philosophical questions of ontology and epistemology and ultimately serves as an epic origin story for the human race as we know it. In the final episode, “Day-break: part 2,” we learn that the human-cylon hybrid child, Hera, is the mitochondrial Eve of all humans living on present-day Earth. This narrative device serves to catalyze an ontological shift in the viewer that takes a turn to a sort of retroactive posthumanism. Part of the effect of the narrative is the viewer’s unwitting but inevitable role in the end of the story as always-already part cylon. That is, the end of the narrative of *BSG* makes clear that we, as viewers, now in the storyworld are the descendants of both humans and cylons, The Eight model, most specifically as represented by the versions Boomer and Athena, is of crucial importance to the understanding of the ontological shift resulting from the end of the narrative. Genetically speaking, the Eight model is the mother of the mother of us all. As such, she is given several roles to play in the story (a responsibility made easier by the fact that there are many copies of her). The various representations of the Eight model, but most importantly Boomer and Athena, point towards a hybridized, posthuman ontology, and, more specifically a posthuman subjectivization process. In particular, Athena uses narrative to form the self that she wants to be, and the collaborative effort on the part of the cylons and the humans changes the narrative that has always played out before. That is, instead of total destruction brought on by human-cylon war, they reach instead for a posthuman hybridity that skirts the narrative’s tired teleology and brings instead the beginning of a new narrative.

Much of the scholarship surrounding *BSG* deals specifically with the Eight Model, signaling her importance in this narrative; however, most existing scholarship predates the end of the TV series<sup>9</sup>, meaning that the Eight Model's crucial importance and the retroactive posthuman turn was not yet part of the equation. Chapter four offers a reading of the Eight Model, including discussion of the psychoanalytic aspects of the cylon models generally and the Eight Model specifically, in order to argue that the crucial component of posthuman subjectivization is the both/and approach—the acceptance of radical constructedness. In other words, to transcend the binary model, we must break out of the categories altogether. The Eight Model provides a template on which to model a subjectivity that embraces both the human and posthuman.

Just as the Eight Model provides a template for posthuman subjectivization, so too does Echo in Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse*. Protagonists usually have an epiphanic moment or, perhaps, a few epiphanic moments, over the course of a narrative. Echo, however, experiences epiphanic moments as moments of subjectivization, wherein she embraces that she is something other than human in that she can access many selves at any given time. A “doll” in Rossum Corporation's Los Angeles Dollhouse, an underground (literally and figuratively) facility that provides technologically enhanced people—made to order—to wealthy individuals, corporations, or even military groups, Echo is imprinted with different personalities (called “imprints”) each time she is tasked on an “engagement.” Very much akin to prostitution, the Dollhouse's agenda is, at first, “merely” to fulfill desire—for a hefty fee. By the end of the series, however, we know that Rossum's real agenda is to develop neural programming technology to such a degree that they can seize power from the government and render most humans their subject-less slaves. Echo, it turns out, is a key player in this plan.

---

<sup>9</sup> The bulk of the existing scholarship was published in or before 2008.

Despite its short run, *Dollhouse* has garnered a fair amount of critical attention. Many scholars note the use of intertextuality in the show, particularly in the patterning of the narrative arc itself. For example, Rhonda Wilcox points to Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (par 1); Kristin Noone and K. Dale Koontz both explore the connections between the series and the Czech play, *Rossum's Universal Robots*; and Cynthea Masson highlights the use of the *Canterbury Tales* in a specific episode and in the series more generally. The attention so far turned to intertextuality and the show's engagement with prior texts as patterns stops short of an examination of the use of narrative itself. My argument will situate this series as another example of posthuman subjectivization through narrative, one that exhibits a variation of the onto-epistemology that the previous chapters develop. Wilcox argues that the show directly engages our own complicity in the machinations at work in this world to oppress. At one level, she argues, this complicity represents Whedon's and our own complicity in the Broadcast TV model, a model which has been unkind to Whedon (and his fans) in the past.

Echo's subject position is predicated on being a second-order observer. Before gaining the ability to observe and experience simultaneously, Echo is able only to observe her polysemic identity in moments of reflection. But as she grows in her abilities, she learns to re-enter the system as the observer. Being a participant observer, furthermore, gives her narrative agency, allows her to change the story. Indeed, I contend that Echo's subjectivity and subjectivization process are really echoes of media narrative. That is, Echo is multi-authored—in the storyworld as well as a TV character. She represents, I argue, the posthuman turn we have made as subjects of new media technologies.

In what follows, I explore the various permutations of the evolving role of the second-order observer, first explaining the processes by which a second-order observer re-enters the



narrative system and then detailing the transformation of the observer into witness, director, and finally narrative agent. An understanding of these processes, I contend, opens up new ways of understanding how the technologically mediated narratives we consume alter our ontological position within our various narrative systems.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INSCRIBED OBSERVATION: THE RE-ENTRY OF THE SECOND-ORDER OBSERVER IN JOHN BARTH'S *GILES GOAT-BOY* AND RICHARD POWERS'S *GALATEA 2.2*

*Never was such a wonder as this story!*

—John Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*

*The life we lead is our only maybe. The tale we tell is the must that we make by living it.*

—Richard Powers, *Galatea 2.2*

John Barth and Richard Powers, writing three decades apart, address similar issues in their respective technologically driven “campus novels,” *Giles Goat-Boy* and *Galatea 2.2*. The posthuman tropes of both of these texts give rise to the consideration of shared elements between the two. In both cases, artificial intelligence is central to the story. Both novels deal with the tensions resulting from epistemological divisions—Barth’s novel allegorically focusing on ideological divisions, and Powers’s on the tensions between science and narrative. Both novels contain major non-human (at least partially) characters: Giles is the son of a computer and a human, and Helen is an artificial intelligence spread out over a network of computers. Both novels stress the importance of narrative. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, both Barth and Powers write themselves into the story as characters—Barth as “J.B.” and Powers as “Richard Powers.” This chapter explores the role of second-order observation (with an understanding of first-order observation) and re-entry, both concepts from systems theory, in order to argue that the linguistic embodiments of both Barth and Powers blur the boundaries between reality and fiction, allowing for, and indeed catalyzing, ontological and epistemological shifts. That is, such an inscription into the stories signals a shift in the way we imagine ourselves interfacing with the world, both

inside and outside the narrative frame. Through the processes of observation and re-entry, the observer (here figured as the author) becomes a character, who then becomes a character-observer. The dual role catalyzes an ontological shift—a shift that I suggest is distinctly post-human, and which echoes in both form and content.

To understand second-order observation, we must first understand first-order observation in Luhmann's terms. Luhmann's most important contribution to systems theory, according to N. Katherine Hayles, is his turning observation into an origin. That is, observation, whether second-order or not, marks a distinction, which allows for what Luhmann calls "cutting up the world" (Hayles, "Making the Cut" 71-72). By this logic, the system/environment distinction so foundational to systems theory effectively does not exist until it is observed. This emendation, according to Hayles, adds to systems theory a much needed corrective—narrative—because it erects a narrative frame around systems theory and because it is itself a narrative of origin. Hayles argues that

the coexistence of narrative with system can be seen in Luhmann's account of the creation of a system, for his account is, of course, itself a narrative. Its very presence suggests that systems theory needs narrative as a supplement, just as much, perhaps, as narrative needs at least an implicit system to generate itself. Narrative reveals what systems theory occludes; systems theory articulates what narrative struggles to see. ("Making the Cut" 72)

First-order observation, then, brings narrative to systems theory because the presence of a system and its environment is merely a static "fact," whereas an observer marking a distinction between system and environment is an event with temporal contingency. The problem of first-order observation, however, is the temptation to imagine someone or something observing from *outside*

the system and its environment, or observation as a metaposition. But this metaposition does not exist; the observer is from within the system (or the environment) and is always already part of the distinction, part of the process of distinguishing, and part of the interaction between system and environment. Here, second-order observation comes into play: the observer observes him/her/itself observing. In this figuration, then, the observer is re-inscribed into the system being observed, as observer, and, if it is truly a second-order observation, he/she/it does so with the understanding of being both the observer and part of the observed.

By virtue of its role as originary presence, Luhmann's observer takes on creative power, for marking a distinction makes a world, and an importance once held by the subject. Indeed, Luhmann claims that "in the subject it is now easy to recognize the observer" ("Paradoxy" 50). This merging of the subject and the observer is central, I argue, to a posthuman narrative onto-epistemology. That is, our very ontologies radically shift in light of second-order observation. To reconcile the subject with the observer, then, it is helpful to think through the observer alongside the subject of psychoanalysis. Jonathan Elmer attempts to link Lacan and Luhmann primarily through their respective positions on observation (as well as temporality). He labels both Lacan's and Luhmann's perspectives "hypo-epistemological," which he defines as a meta-awareness largely attributable to the fall of subject-centered philosophies. He suggests that "[a] fundamental consequence of discarding subjectivist approaches to sociality is the recognition, by now canonical, that there is no vantage—even the theoretical one of 'absolute knowledge'—from which once can perceive and know a reality as absolutely external to oneself" (121). Nina Ort agrees, but suggests that "[p]erhaps one could say we operate *as if* (in a psychoanalytic sense) we could observe from an external position, but only retrospectively will we be able to observe what we have done. [. . .] There is no metaposition" (42). Both Elmer and Ort attempt to

tease out an awareness of the paradox at the heart of this problem: even as we see from a meta-position, we know it is still an incomplete picture and that we must not be lulled into believing that we actually have a totalizing gaze.

The totalizing gaze is an illusion, in part, because cutting up the world via observation cannot be done without an element of blindness, according to Luhmann. In other words, every vantage point has a blind spot. The observer can observe his or her observation, but not completely. Luhmann argues that the operation of observation “includes the exclusion of the unobservable, including, moreover, the unobservable par excellence, observation itself, the observer-in-operation. The place of the observer is the unmarked state out of which it crosses a boundary to draw a distinction and in which it finds itself indistinguishable from anything else” (“Paradox” 44). To illustrate this, I use an example from Barth’s most canonical text, “Lost in the Funhouse.” Ambrose, the narrator whose sentences tend to convey both narrative content and narrative process, reflects on standing in front of the funhouse mirrors attempting to see himself in an infinite regress of reflection: “Second, as he wondered at the endless replication of his image in the mirrors, second, as he *lost himself in the reflection* that the necessity for an observer makes perfect observation impossible” (94 emphasis in original). This passage illustrates the paradox of observation—to lose oneself in that being observed is to cease being conscious of being an observer, but observation requires losing oneself. Observation, in short, requires a sort of self-blindness. Elmer argues that the very blindness inherent to observation gives it creative power:

Every observation involves making a distinction, the background operative unity of which is that observation’s enabling blind spot, at once constituting the system’s operational closure and bringing forth a world. It would seem that one

needs the figure and errancy of observation in order to serve as cover for the more profoundly creative power of blindness. (127)

The creative power of blindness lies in the fact that it is precisely in the blind spot that the observer has the power to create an image of himself, a repetition with an awareness. Elmer further argues that “[i]n pointing out this rupture and this blindness, ‘observation’ creates the necessary next fiction of ‘operation.’ The problem is that this ‘observation’ cannot but presuppose the ‘operation,’ and in positing a blinded observer [. . .] the observing system merely regards itself in the mirror without recognizing that fact” (131). The act of observation, then, always already presupposes that such an action “exists,” but until the observer marks the distinction between self and world, thereby creating that distinction, the blind observer is not only blind, but also unaware. The act of second order observation requires awareness of the self’s placement with regard to the system in which that self is placed. This moment of awareness signals the re-entry of the observer into the system, the self into the world.

For Luhmann, second-order observation, and its attendant self-blindness, helps to repair what he sees as the major flaws of centuries of Western theorizing: “The miracle of symbolization, the marvelous, that which has been most admired by our tradition, has to be replaced by a difference that, when observed, always regenerates the unobservable” (“Paradoxy” 44). Indeed, Luhmann acknowledges that not only does second-order observation serve to make repairs to philosophy, it also dovetails nicely with contemporary theory: “The excluded third, or the ‘interpretant’ in the sense of Peirce, or the operation of observing in our theory, or the ‘parasite’ in the sense of Michael Serres, or the ‘supplement’ or ‘parergon’ in Derrida’s sense, is the active factor indeed, without which the world could not observe itself. Observation has to operate unobserved to be able to cut up the world” (Luhmann, “Paradoxy” 46). Luhmann here underscores the

blindness of observation as central to the power of observation to cut up the world or to put it in Elmer's terms, to "bring forth a world." These two seemingly incommensurable descriptions of the same activity, cutting up a world and bringing forth a world, are of import. That is, in order to create a world, by this logic, one must observe, and by observing, mark distinctions, differences, boundaries. To categorize, catalogue, taxonomize, and analyze, then, is simultaneously to create a world.

Keeping in mind the tension between the seeming totalizing gaze and the knowledge that it is not so, I move to observation's role in the creation and maintenance of the psyche. In other words, the distinction between psychic and social system makes observers of us all. Further, I argue that, being observers, we re-enter narrative texts as observers, creating a repetition with an awareness. This re-entry into story after story after story is what drives the subjectivization process. Every experience, real or fictive, inscribes itself onto the story of our lives, becomes part of the data that make us up, changes us. We are, in a very real sense, the stories we tell ourselves, the relationships we have with those stories, and the ways in which we interact with and react to the narratives onto and out of which we find ourselves endlessly mapped. This multiple relationship to narrative is inscribed onto our psyches. Our observation, then, becomes an integral part of subjectivization, for "distinction comes to be operative within the psyche itself" (Bronfen and Schmidt 5). That is, similar to Lacan's notion of subjectivizing through one's specular realization of self and other in the mirror stage, Luhmann's observation marks a distinction, a difference by which the self might be formed.

Elisabeth Bronfen and Benjamin Marius Schmidt remind us that, in psychoanalysis, "for the psyche to see itself, it has to make use of distinctions offered by the social system, which is to say, it has to take the detour via communication. It will thus be able to observe itself, but that

which it observes is no longer itself” (7). This is made possible, they argue, by Luhmann’s concept of re-entry. In systems-theoretical terms, re-entry is “the reappearance of a difference within the domain of its objects” (Luhmann, *Social Systems* 488). Luhmann explicates it further in his article “The Paradox of Observing Systems”:

If we observe such a re-entry, we see a paradox. The re-entering distinction is the same, and it is not the same. But the paradox does not prevent the operations of the system. On the contrary, it is the condition of their possibility because the autopoiesis requires *continuing* actuality with *different* operations, *actualizing different possibilities*. (42, emphases in original)

Re-entry of the observer, then, is a sort of repetition with a difference. More specifically, it is a repetition with an awareness—the awareness itself being the difference. The observer re-enters the system knowing his/her/its status in relation to the system as well as to the observation of the system. Elsewhere, Luhmann argues that “the system *makes the difference* between system and environment and *copies* that difference in the system to be able to use it as a *distinction*. This operation of re-inventing the difference as a distinction can be conceived as a re-entry of a form into the form, or the distinction into the distinguished space” (Luhmann, “Why Does Society” 172-73, emphases in original). In other words, in observing the distinction, the observer *creates* the difference. The act of observation brings forth the system under observation, the observer included.

In what follows, I articulate the ways in which we can see narrative as a form of second-order observation. In his examination of systems theory and the distinction between communication and consciousness, Dietrich Schwanitz argues that “[o]bservation of observation is thus an emergent phenomenon [. . .]. Through the code of science, all knowledge is subjected to a second



edition and reorganized as the observation of observation. Accordingly, *literature would have to be observed as a type of observation*” (503, emphasis added). In this formulation, then, literature itself is the figure of observation. Indeed, Luhmann argues that

[t]he main preoccupation of intellectuals is no longer wisdom, nor prudence, nor reason, but second-order descriptions. They describe *how* others describe what others describe. [. . .] Second-order description, however, seems to be a general characteristic of a specialization concerned with the interpretation of texts. (“Why Do Societies?” 182)

By this logic, literature is a form of second-order observation. This notion of literature as observation is surely not new—the writer has long been figured as one who observes and records. Even the inscription of observer as an active participant in the text can be seen abundantly throughout postmodern texts (and earlier texts as well). I argue, however, that we need to view this inscription from a posthuman standpoint, primarily through the notions of observation and re-entry in systems theory.

Central to a posthuman understanding of narrative onto-epistemology is the observer’s interpellation into the story. That is, we see an ontological and epistemological shift take place when the figure of the observer is called into the story itself. Operating along the lines of system re-entry and interpenetration, the observer becomes participating observer and observing participant. If we think of an author as an observer, then the author’s interpellation into the story is second-order observation par excellence. The author is now writing about his own process, blending the “truth” of the author’s re-embodiment into a purely linguistic structure with fictional narrative. I posit that we might think of this intrusion of the observer into the story as a type of re-entry. The author as observer, that is, re-enters the narrative system, but with the awareness

of being an observer. The result is the repetition with an awareness that enables subjectivization as observing participant. While the awareness of the author (and the text) is certainly a postmodern trademark, I argue that this re-entry asks us to view the problem from a posthuman standpoint, opening some doors into the relationship between self and story.

### **John Barth**

In his book, *Five Strands of Fictionality*, Daniel Punday ties the so-called rise of fictionality in everyday life to the institutions that promote various strands of narrative. Punday starts the discussion with Barth's "occasional writing" (*The Friday Book*) and *Giles Goat-Boy*, arguing that the latter in particular was a watershed moment for Barth because, in it, he embraces fully the mythic nature of fictionality. After this moment, for Barth, Punday argues, "[t]o transcend the occasion of writing is the very thing that defines the fictional" (40). While the mythic mode put forward by Barth is riddled with problems, such as the exclusion of women and people of color, and has since fallen largely out of favor, in 1966 it was a progressive moment giving rise to new ways of thinking that grew from, and ultimately away from, existentialist psychoanalytic theories. *Giles Goat-Boy* also reflects, Punday argues, the tension between fictional narratives and the institutions that give rise to them. Finally, the novel marks a moment in which Barth commits to metafiction and begins reflecting on his role as author (or, in our present context, his role as observer). While Punday remarks that *Giles Goat-Boy* is widely considered one of Barth's weakest novels, he argues that the novel reveals some things about the shift in the discursive field surrounding postmodernism (38). I argue that it does more than that: it engages an early posthumanism, one that is still very firmly rooted in the tenets of humanism, yet nevertheless strives for transcendence, not just of the occasion of writing, as Punday would have it, but also to the occasion of humanism.

I begin here with a passage from Barth's novel, *Letters*, published in 1979, a decade after *Giles Goat-Boy*. *Letters* is an epistolary novel in which John Barth, also called "The Author," communicates through letters with several of the characters in his previous novels. One of his correspondents is Jerome Bray, who claims to be the descendant of Harold Bray, the anti-Grand tutor in stark opposition to Giles, the titular character sired by an advanced computer intelligence and a virgin human. Bray Claims that Barth has plagiarized the holy words of *The Revised New Syllabus* (29-30, 148). "The Author" at last replies to Bray at length:

I did indeed spend the first half of the 1960s writing a long novel which was published in August 1966, under the title *Giles Goat-Boy*. It is the story of a child sired by an advanced computer upon a virgin lady and raised by kindly goats on the experimental livestock farms of a nameless university which encompasses and replicates the world. In young 'manhood' my goat-boy learns from his tutor that the extraordinary circumstances of his birth and youth correspond to the wandering heroes of myth. With this actuarial pattern as his map and script, he adventures to the heart and through the bowels of the campus, twice fails at the accomplishment of certain ambiguous labors, and the third time succeeds—though in a fashion equivocal as the tasks themselves—to the status of 'Grand Tutor.'

It was my further pleasure to reorchestrate the venerable conceit, old as the genre of the novel, that the fiction is not a fiction: *Giles Goat-Boy* pretends to be a computer-edited and –printed, perhaps computer-authored, transcript of tapes recorded by the goat-boy and—under the title *R.N.S.: The Revised New Syllabus*, etc.—laid on the Author by Giles's son for further editing and publication. (531)

I begin with this passage for several reasons. First, I think a clearer, more succinct, and eloquent summary could not be written of *Giles Goat-Boy*. In addition, this example points to another related inscription of second-order observation: here the fictionalized author of the text under examination, himself inscribed as character into this later text, discusses the earlier text and its authorship. But more than that, this passage demonstrates the central concerns of this section—namely, the observational practices of the author as figured in Barth’s work, the narrative artifice of author-as-character, the foundational role played by story in subjectivization, the primacy of epistemology, and the integration of (the theorizing of) new media and information technologies into print narrative in Barth’s work.

I argue that second-order observation is the foundational topos from which to analyze the other systems in process alongside it (for our purposes, namely narrative, consciousness, and epistemological impulse). I further argue that the narrative artifice of author-as-character is the primary way in which second-order observation, and by extension, re-entry, exhibit themselves in this text, and indeed in *Galatea 2.2*. The author’s purely linguistic embodiment as fictional character inscribes into the text the observer observing himself observing. That is not to say, however, that we can accurately pin the observations to the physical embodiment (John Barth himself) that the linguistic embodiment ostensibly represents. That is, the notion that the author can seamlessly transmit his psyche into a linguistic construct to be interpreted by the reader is both a fantasy and a potential blind spot.<sup>10</sup> I argue that the inscription itself—of the author into observing character (at times, narrator)—is indicative of second-order observation and that thinking through the problem in this way opens some doors into understanding the ways in which we

---

<sup>10</sup> I use the term “blind spot” here purposefully to evoke the creative potential in this fantasy. That is, while John Barth’s linguistic embodiment is not equal to being the “actual” John Barth, it is an *as if* scenario that creates—makes a world—by marking a distinction.

see that narrative, consciousness, epistemology, and technology are all inextricably linked in catalyzing a posthuman subjectivization.

While many critics mention the fact that Barth writes himself into the paratext of this novel, there are no sustained arguments surrounding its importance. E.P. Walkiewicz merely claims that the artifice casts doubt upon the narrative itself, and Zack Bowen claims only “that Barth, at least in some measure, identifies himself with the hero of his novel, which might be his own allegory as well as any other monomythic hero’s” (39). Jac Tharpe, highlighting the religious aspects of the novel, argues that

If Giles is the author, it was the hero himself who wrote. Even J.B. has tampered with the text, however, and that is the case with holy words. J.B. is converted by a missionary with a book, and he then becomes the editor of the RNS. He could not pose as author. The paraphernalia enclosing the text furnishes a complete record or an edited text. Like other holy words, this is an ocean of story. (89)

Casting Barth’s textual artifice as a device to convey, however ironically, the text’s status as holy scripture, Tharpe points to the tension between thinking of the author as a godlike figure and thinking of the author as an interpreter and transcriber of knowledge, information, and narrative. Indeed, in the cover letter, J.B., who signs off as “This regenerate Seeker after Answers,” claims, “I submit it to you neither as its author nor as agent for another in the usual sense, but as a disinterested servant of Our Culture” (xxxvi, xxii). J.B., then, attempts to assert himself not as author but rather as servant to the narrative itself. Charles B. Harris focuses on the relativity of the text, arguing that “[t]he artifice in *Giles Goat-Boy* suggests that the entire novel is but a ‘way of speaking,’ an approximation of a Truth that cannot be formulated. At the same time, the novel affirms ‘ways of speaking’ as, quite simply, the only way *to* speak” (PV 102, emphasis in origi-

nal). All of these critiques point to fascinating dimensions of the textual artifice, but they fall short of noting the crucial element of second-order observation. Without fully examining not just the narrative itself, but the phenomenon of the narrative re-entry of the observer, we miss the multi-faceted levels of that repetition with an awareness. The re-inscription of the author into the text hints at the same multi-faceted involvement in reading a text. The reader, too, is implicated in this process of second-order observation. In effect we are observing second-order observation in process.

This notion of second-order observation can be seen in more general, and thus more sustained, critiques of authorship in Barth's work. Mark McGurl argues that "the heroism of the goat-boy could be understood as a figure of democratized Authorship itself, of the spiritual authority of even the lowliest man or woman to play God in the domain of his or her own imagination, if nowhere else" (41). *Giles Goat-Boy* reflects what McGurl calls the "autopoietic process" (18), the term itself a play on the autopoiesis of systems theory. For McGurl, the autopoietic process functions as a self-observatory practice and is tied up with the rise of creative writing departments in the university. Berndt Clavier argues that Barth's status as an author of fiction and criticism invites theorizing about his relationship to his own texts. Barth, he claims, is often at odds with himself, particularly the claims he makes in his nonfiction and the work he performs in his fiction. This disjunction can cause an "interpretive problem" (140). Readers of Barth's fiction and nonfiction, in other words, find themselves wondering where Barth really falls on the question of authorship. Patricia Tobin calls *Giles Goat-Boy* a "glorious achievement of massive authorial repression," arguing that "the book whose plot is closest to Barth's definition of the heroic life as an obstacle course and scavenger hunt, whose heroic quest is closest to Barth's ideal of the literary career, and whose extravagant hero is closest to Barth's identification of himself as

a poet” (70). As Tobin sees it, Barth’s anxieties about authorship bubble up in a glorious showing of the return of the repressed in *Giles Goat-Boy*. In *The Friday Book*, Barth weighs in on authorial self-consciousness, reminding us of its long history in literature and arguing that it is “often manifested as narrative self-reflexiveness and usually condemned as the last-ditch decadence of modern self-consciousness in general” (207). He provides an important caveat, however: “These authorial selves and surrogates as characters” are usually “just as fictitious as their fellow characters” (*FB* 210). Underscoring the poststructuralist understanding of our selves as constructions, it seems, is part of Barth’s agenda, but he also highlights here the fact that these fictive selves are indeed just that—fiction. His reinscription as author, that is, is just as fictive as the characters with no embodied referent in the world. As he puts it in *The Friday Book*, “the universe is a novel; God is a novelist!” (22-23); “the novelist is not finally a spectator, an imitator, or a purger of the public psyche, but a maker of universes: a demiurge” (29). Despite Barth’s seeming hubris here, elsewhere he refers to *Giles Goat-Boy* and *The Sot-Weed Factor* as “novels which imitate the form of the Novel, by an author who imitates the role of Author” (*FB* 72). What he does not say, but seems to suggest, is that even our embodied selves are fictitious. That is, we are all comprised of linguistic and narrative constructions that lend a fictive quality to our existence.

The re-entry of the observer into the narrative system, I argue, catalyzes the subjectivization process. That is, we shift ontologically each time we enter a narrative system we observe ourselves observing. I argue that this subjectivization process is made clear through two distinct means—the textual artifice in which Barth writes himself into the text and the narrative of Giles’s own subjectivization process. In other words, both the form and the content of the novel reflect this interconnectedness between self and story. While most critics of this text highlight

Barth's use of the hero's journey and his admission that he was influenced by Lord Raglan's and Joseph Campbell's discussions of this trope, very few acknowledge the broader implications of Giles's patterning himself after the *stories* of heroes. That is, most of the existing scholarship on *Giles Goat Boy* highlights the prevalence of myth but misses the crucial aspect of narrative itself, a trope that figures prominently in most, if not all, of Barth's work, both fictional and non-fictional.

Barth himself underscores the centrality of narrative in consciousness in several places in his nonfiction; Barth addresses the theories of consciousness of Daniel Dennett, Gerald Edelman, and Oliver Sachs, noting that

the concept of the self as an *as if*—as a heuristic fiction—is central to Dennett's theory of consciousness, and right up this storyteller's alley. Consciousness as multiply drafted scenario-spinning; language as 'not [simply] something we constructed, but something in which we created and recreated ourselves'; storytelling (that is, our concocting and controlling the ongoing story that we tell others and ourselves about who we are) as 'our fundamental tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition'; the recognition that 'our tales are spun, but for the most part we don't spin them; they spin us.' (*FF* 195)

But the power of story does not stop here for Barth. Drawing, as he often does, on the story of *The Thousand and One Nights*, he claims that Scheherazade

is the emblem of not only us professional storytellers, whose continuance is always on the line, but also of the (fictionalistical, *as if*-ish) scenario-spinner that is the continuously auto-creating self of every one of us. Go up an order of generality, and I don't doubt that the same might be said of a subculture, of a culture, per-



haps of the species homo sapiens: We *are* the stories that we tell ourselves about who we are. (*FF* 196)

In terms of authorship, then, Barth seems ambivalent, if not pessimistic, about authorial agency, whether by this we mean author-of-story or author-of-self. Barth insists that even as we write our stories into existence, our stories write *us* into existence. Elsewhere, Barth claims that “[i]t is not speaking mystically to say that our dreams dream us; that our fictions construct us, at least as sub-contractors” (*FB* 210). The story, for Barth, is, if not *the author*, at least the co-author, and our drive to tell stories also drives our subjectivization. Further, story’s agency extends beyond self-creation; story, as Barth tells it, writes culture into creation, writes the species itself into existence. It seems then, that Barth would agree with Bruce Clarke’s assessment that narrative is the byproduct of systems, and that, indeed, narrative drives system functioning.

Beyond Barth’s explicit, if at times ambivalent, statements intimating the importance of narrative in subjectivization, he inscribes the process in detail in *Giles Goat-Boy*. Giles is introduced to stories by his mother (though he does not yet know that the woman he calls Lady Creamhair is his mother). She visits him at the goat farm and reads stories to him. Giles immediately latches onto the power of narrative to inform, and, more importantly, to map onto one’s own life. His first story, “Billy Goat’s Gruff,” spurs him to think of himself as the character of the particularly gruff billy goat. The character, he says, was “to my mind, the real hero” (55). His mother’s visit, and the stories she shares, mark the first time he is not completely honest with his keeper and father-figure, Max. He decides to keep to himself what he discovers in the grove with his mother, “this miracle called *story*” (56). As the days wear on and Lady Creamhair reads him more stories, Giles learns the power of narrative to bring knowledge, and the power, in turn, that knowledge has to affect one’s being. As he learns more stories, Giles maps himself onto

heroes, villains, and trolls. He calls this period of his life “a painful season,” for no matter what he feels himself to be, he longs to be something else. The introduction of narrative, then, allows him to search for his identity, something he has never had to do as a goat (57). As he hears more stories, though, he can no longer identify as any particular role or character with certainty. As narrative proliferates, so too do the possibilities for identification.

Narrative becomes not only how he figures his ontology, but also how he situates himself with regard to epistemology. Giles says, “*The Encyclopedia Tammanica* I read from Aardvaark to Zymurgy in quite the same spirit as I read the *Old School Tales*, my fancy prefacing each entry ‘Once upon a time . . .’” (117). He acknowledges that he “was disposed to approach the events of history as critically as those of fiction” (116). Viewing history and fiction as different words for the same phenomenon, Giles plays out his life as story, with himself as the hero. Integrating ontology and epistemology through narrative means, Giles eventually sees himself as a character, or rather as a potential series of characters, in a long and many-branching narrative:

I had seen generations of kids grow to goathood, reproduce themselves, and die, like successive casts of characters, while I seemed scarcely to age at all. I had lived in goatdom as Billy Bocksfuss the Kid, now I meant to live in studentdom as George the Undergraduate; surely there would be other roles in other realms, an endless succession of names and natures. Little wonder I looked upon my life and the lives of others as a kind of theatrical impromptu, self-knowledge as a matter of improvisation, and moral injunctions, such as those of the *Fables*, whether high-minded or wicked, as so many stage-directions. (117)

The story might change, in other words, and when the story changes, so, too, must the self.

A fictional example of Barth's belief in the power of narrative to construct us, Giles can only become what his story allows him to be. Giles must build a self story through engagement with smaller stories. Giles's narrative possibilities, therefore, are limited to the stories he already has as maps—templates for writing a story of his own. For example, early in the narrative, Max says to Giles, "You haven't read much but the old epics yet, Georgie, or you'd know how it was between old men and young women" (141). The implication here is that once Giles is exposed to a broader range of stories, he will be able to structure his own story more adequately. Giles admits that he uses stories to map his life:

I still preferred literature to any other subject, and the old stories of adventure to any other literature; but my response to them was by no means intellectual. I couldn't have cared less what light they shed upon student cultures in ancient terms, or what their place was in the history of Western Campus art; though my eyes and ears were keen enough, I took no interest in stylistics, allegorical values, or questions of form: all that mattered was the hero's performance." (115-16)

Giles fixates on the herd's performance because he believes himself to be the hero of (t)his story, and he needs to learn as much as he can from past stories about how best to play the part. As Giles "feeds" on story, he feels more equipped to engage the world. Indeed, he thinks of his transformation from goat to human (or rough approximation of human, at least) in terms of learning narratives: "Then I had known nothing; now my eyes were open to fenceless meadows of information; I felt engorged to bursting with human lore" (122-23). Giles transforms—by way of narrative—from Billy Bocksfuss the goat-boy to George Giles, the soon-to-be Grand Tutor.

With all this agency given to story, what happens to human agency, particular to the power of human epistemology? Barth seems to suggest, as we will see, that we have to intervene

where we can within the story, write ourselves into the story, build ourselves better parts in the story, and attempt to steer the story where possible. Giles finally embraces the task of narrative self-creation: “I was not born George; I was not born anything; I had invented myself as I’d elected my name, and it was to myself I’d present my card (already ‘properly signed’) when I had passed by the Finals” (693). Finally having heard and read enough stories to be able to transcend the narrative, then, Giles ascends to the status of Grand Tutor precisely when he pens his own story in his own way. He must still draw from the narratives that helped shape him, but they no longer constrict him through their parameters. Rather, he revises the parameters to fit his changing ontological status, mixing and matching narrative genres until he finds the right narrative mode in which to live his story.

The primary strategy for narrative self-creation is an engagement with epistemology. David Morrell argues that “[t]ragic heroes have tragic flaws, and this is a trait of character we have seen before in Barth’s fiction: the passionate urge to know” (79). What I have been calling the epistemological impulse, then, is a central concern for Barth. That is, revising one’s ontology requires an engagement with epistemology. The drive to know helps constitute the ontological position of the knower by providing (primarily narrative) epistemological frameworks around which one can build an ontological position, a subjectivity. Several aspects of *Giles Goat-Boy* bear this out. The storyworld’s premise, universe as university, implies that Barth is playing with the notion of the postmodern epistemological crisis, particularly the ways in which the academic institution contributes to the problematizing of knowledge and knowledge-making. The ultimate goal for Giles, and indeed for all “studentdom,” is commencement, as mythical—and mystical—in this text as salvation is in what we must call “the real world.” To graduate, then, is to reach a point where knowledge has coalesced to such a degree that the student may pass from

studentdom to something other. After over 800 pages of trial and error, Giles realizes that “[s]tudentdom it was that limped: hobbled by false distinction, crippled by categories [. . .] my infirmity was that I *had* thought myself first goat, then wholly human boy, when in fact I was a goat-boy, both and neither: a walking refutation of such false conceits” (653, emphasis in original). Giles here realizes that the epistemological framework through which the University operates is ultimately restrictive, holding back “Studentdom” from the transcendent understanding that epistemological categories are arbitrary and artificially constructed. He is not saying that categories have no use value, but rather that a blind and rigid insistence on the “naturalness” of these categories only problematically compartmentalizes knowledge. To grow into the new ontology that Giles seeks—that of neither human, computer, nor goat, but all and none simultaneously, Giles must first transcend categorization itself and take his place as a walking third term.

Giles’s epistemological journey began, as we have seen, under the tutelage of his mother and Max Spielman, who “fed” him stories—both “true” and “fictional.” His epistemological growth continues while attempting to complete his assignments given to him by his father, WESCAC, the artificial intelligence that runs the West Campus. His epistemological method during this period changes to one that conforms (to some degree) to institutional expectations. In other words, his epistemology becomes quite literally disciplined. It is only by growing out of those disciplinary categories, however, that Giles is able to transcend the epistemological framework from which he begins his journey. In order to become Grand Tutor, Giles has to fulfill a series of cryptic assignments, all of which he completes not just once, but twice, the second time taking the opposite approach to solving the problem of what he chose the first time.<sup>11</sup> On his

---

<sup>11</sup> Giles’s assignment is as follows: “1) Fix the Clock, 2) End the Boundary Dispute, 3) Overcome Your Infirmity, 4) See Through Your Ladyship, 5) Re-place the Founder’s Scroll, 6) Pass the Finals, 7) Present Your ID-card, Ap-

second time through, Giles muses that “[t]hings had to be lost before they could be found, broken before they could be fixed, infirm before they could be well, opaque before they could be clear—in short, failed before they could be passed” (682). The opposing terms of the binary, then, must both assert themselves. And indeed, merely moving from one term to the opposing term is not enough. The terms themselves must be transcended, the categories re-imagined. While each of the seven assignments involves epistemological endeavors, focus here only on the fifth assignment, which is to “Re-place the Founder’s Scroll,” the thinly veiled analogue to the Bible (428). The Founder’s Scroll, the center of at least as much hermeneutic dispute as its analogue, resides in the Library, but the CACAFILE, the West Campus Library’s computer filing system, has never settled on where in the library to file it. The Founder’s Scroll, therefore, floats above the other texts within the library. The central mythology of the storyworld, in other words, exists outside the epistemological frameworks employed by the West Campus. Facing the assignment the first time, and confronted with the fact that his rival, the false Grand Tutor Harold Bray, has already replaced the Founder’s Scroll, Giles argues,

the Library’s difficulties in filing the scroll stemmed from insufficiently clear distinctions—as did (I added pointedly) many other problems in the University, whose resolution must inevitably be attended with some upheaval. The fact was, I asserted, that the Founder’s Scroll, like the Old and New Syllabi, was unique; *sui generis*, of necessity, else it would be false. The CACAFILE needed then simply to be instructed to create unique categories for unique items, and the filing should proceed without difficulty. (553)

---

propriately Signed, to the Proper Authority” (428). All of the assignments are polysemic enough that Giles is able to interpret them in multiple and contradictory ways, reinforcing the underlying agenda of the novel—to trouble binaries and categories.

Again, Giles refuses to choose between two terms of a binary opposition, which creates rigid classification systems that come with rigid boundaries and divisions. Giles reminds his listeners (and readers) that categories themselves are constructed as epistemological tools; they are not infallible.

Facing the fifth assignment the second time through, Giles eats the shredded copies of the Founder's Scroll the CACAFILE spits out, embracing, or rather, quite literally ingesting the fragmented nature of the knowledge the Founder's Scroll provides. His actions fuel disagreements among Founder's Scroll scholars of the interpretation on arguably the most crucial part of the Founder's Scroll, revealing that the fundamental textual anchor of the Founder's Scroll can be translated as both "Flunkèd who would Pass" or "Passèd are the Flunked" (722). One of the scholars insists that it does not matter to him which reading is "'true' in the philosophical sense," but he and his colleagues want to reach a consensus on this passage of the text because "upon their like was constructed the whole mad edifice of campus history, for a clear understanding whereof it was absolutely essential to have accurate texts, 'believe' them or not" (723). Giles's response, upon their asking for his preferred reading, is to scatter the fragments of text, further obfuscating the textual problem. Again, a binary understanding, a choice between two terms, is untenable for Giles. He needs to rewrite the epistemological framework in order to transcend taxonomic structures.

The Posttape reveals the final, presumably "correct," interpretation of the fifth assignment. Giles (or the computer generated simulation of Giles), says,

Her [Anastasia] great nagging faith has alone sustained me, for better or worse, through the monstrous work—this 'Revised New Syllabus,' as she calls it, which she is convinced will supersede the Founder's Scroll [. . .] Supposing even that

the Scroll *were* replaced by these endless tapes, one day to feed Him who will come after me, as I fed once on that old sheepskin—what then? Cycles on cycles, ever unwinding: like my watch; like the reels of this machine she got past her spouse; like the University itself.

Unwind, rewind, replay(755).

Giles's "Revised New Syllabus," which is his *story*, may have the power to challenge the hegemony of the Founder's Scroll, but if it wins the battle, it will simply itself become the equivalent of the Founder's Scroll and will need to be superseded by yet another revision. Central mythologies give way to revisions, and the cycle repeats.

The centrality of the Founder's Scroll in Giles's journey to Grand Tutor also points to the tension between old and new media. The Founder's Scroll is quite literally the written word. Within the storyworld itself, "The Revised New Syllabus" is delivered via a new medium—a series of reels of computer-generated narrative in the voice of George Giles, but *The Revised New Syllabus* as it is delivered to us, the readers, is still in print form. We as readers must sift through several layers of narration delivered in different media, but represented to readers as written text. According to the J.B.'s cover letter to his publishing company, the text itself arrived at his office, delivered by a Giles Stoker or Stoker Giles (J.B. is unsure as to the order of names) (xxxv). Barth has never shied away from discussing, theorizing, and fictionally representing new media forms of narrative, but his chosen delivery method is still print. In *The Friday Book*, he addresses print fiction, or as he calls it here, literature, as solitary, private, and linear (163). He here responds directly to new media, and he finds McLuhan's dictum that the medium is the message to be problematic, although he, perhaps accidentally, agrees with his dictum when he states,



I find the chief implication to be that written literature can deal most appropriately—at least more effectively than any other art—with just those aspects of our experience that are at some remove from direct sensation: not only the whole silent life of the mind—cognition, reflection, speculation, recollection, calculation, and the rest—but even the registration of sensation, so to speak: what perception is *like*. (FB 164)

While he stops just short of scoffing at McLuhan's notion that medium matters more than message, he simultaneously underscores the fact that medium does matter; he simply means that the medium of print fiction matters.

Barth's defense of print fiction in his nonfiction cannot erase the unease that emanates from *Giles Goat-Boy*, however, particularly regarding the rapid influx of new media and new information technologies. Reading itself is augmented by, if not replaced with, the reels of recorded audio that do much of the teaching in the world of *Giles Goat-Boy*. These reels come across as a sort of audio-only internet, the text glossed with what we would now call hyperlinks. When Giles finally enrolls and begins his classes, he is introduced to the teaching machines, which are wired directly into WESCAC's "Central Instructional Facility" (443). The machine allows Giles to hear a lecture with options to push a button when glosses on the lecture are available. The glosses, in turn, have an option when notes are available on the glosses, and so on.<sup>12</sup> This humorous, if frustrating, tour through what we might call a new epistemology suggests that the newer media forms of gaining knowledge (or accessing narrative, as sections of this lecture

---

<sup>12</sup> Also included in this seemingly endless regress of glosses upon glosses are mandatory advertisements, which the listener has no power to skip. I point this out because the similarities between Giles's experience and our own experiences with the internet (seemingly endless regress of hyperlinks, mandatory advertisements that one cannot skip through before, for example, watching a short video) are astounding, especially considering the time of publication of this text.

are narrative in form) are so complex and multi-layered that the only sane thing to do is to abandon them altogether, which is what Giles ultimately decides to do.

This pessimistic view of media does not quite account for the narrative we as readers hold in our hands, however. The main text of *Giles Goat-Boy*, subtitled *The Revised New Syllabus*, is told in first person, ostensibly in the voice of Giles; however, we are told in the Cover Letter that the narrative voice is a simulation of Giles based on actual recordings of him as well as on computer calculations that will most closely approximate a true voice—a simulation that manages to sway even one of the most traditional “Gilesians,” Peter Greene. The story, then, according to this prefatory artifice, is not a traditional one. It is not exactly print narrative, since the print is generated from both audio recordings and from computer simulation. The narrative itself seems to occupy a sort of third space, echoing the notion that subjectivization, too, happens in a third space.

Barth explores, at least in theory, alternative means of delivering his narratives. In his “Author’s Note” prefacing the collection of stories comprising *Lost in the Funhouse*, he claims that some of the stories therein would ideally be heard instead of read. The story “Autobiography,” in particular, Barth intends “for monophonic tape and visible but silent author” (xi). Mark McGurl argues that this suggestion “allows us to see how narrative forms—in this case the genre of autobiography and its associated conventions—can themselves be understood as recording technologies of a kind” (239). McGurl goes on to say that

while we should not be induced to believe that either a narrative form or a recording apparatus could actually speak for itself like a person—that would be taking a science fiction trope too literally—we can at least see, that to the ironically ‘si-

lent' Barth, how persons necessarily *give voice to forms* even when they speak for themselves. (239)

Of course, these examples of Barth's alternative media for narrative all operate in theory only. That is, the way readers actually access the narrative is still through print. In other words, Barth attempts a theoretical engagement with alternative media for narrative, but he stops there. Even his novel, *Coming Soon!!!*, ostensibly largely written in hypertext, is literally delivered in print form. Barth still believes in the power of words on a page to signify, and even to offer flickering signifiers, to borrow a phrase from N. Katherine Hayles. Jeremy Green shares Barth's faith in the power of the novel, arguing that "the distinctive achievement of the late postmodern novel – what makes it worth reading now—lies in the way it engages with the semiotic density of the mediascape, the sign and image saturated spaces that increasingly shape public and private consciousness" (212).

The author is not the only one inscribed into the text. One of Giles's seemingly tangential musings provides an important reminder of the role of the *reader* in the story. Giles, fleeing from his pursuers, sees a librarian reading a novel at her desk, and asks her if there is another way out of the library:

The pimpled maid, thin and udderless as Mrs. Rexford but infinitely less prepossessing, looked over her spectacles from the large novel she was involved in and said with careful clarity—as if that question, from a fleeced goat-boy at just that moment, were exactly what she'd expected—"Yes. A Stairway goes up to the Clockworks from this floor. You may enter it through the little door behind me."

All the while she marked with her finger her place in the book, to which she returned at once upon delivering her line. Mild, undistinguished creature, never seen before or since, whose homely face I forgot in two seconds; whose name, if she bore one, I never knew; whose history and fate, if any she had, must be *lacunae* till the end of terms in my life's story—Passage be yours, for that in your moment of my time you did enounce, clearly as from a written text, your modest information! Simple answer to a simple question, but lacking which this tale were truncate as the Scroll, an endless fragment!

“-less fragment,” I thought I heard her murmur as I stooped through the little door she's pointed out. I paused and frowned; but though her lips moved on, as did her finger across the page, her words were drowned now by the bells of Tower Clock. (724-25)

I quote this passage at length because, for such a seemingly tangential moment in a novel of this size, this small passage, and the nameless character it highlights, points to the reader's place in this story. The passage clearly hints that the nameless librarian is reading what we are reading, but she is aware of her place within the story. She has a cue, and she hits it. But we, too, are hitting our cues, for just as her primary function here is to read the story, for she will not hit her cue if she is not following along, so, too, we, by reading the story, are performing the task without which “this tale were truncate as the Scroll, an endless fragment.” Just as the librarian's simple task of following along in the story and saying her one line so crucial to the resolution of the plot earns her a place in Giles's story, so, too, our following along with the story provides the necessary elements to the narrative's completion. After all, the story ends without a climax if we put the book down. Further, the librarian's confident awareness of her role in the story, and the sure-

ty with which she plays her part, make Giles uncomfortable. Having spent the previous 724 pages trying to find his own place in the story, Giles wonders at her readerly confidence in being a participant observer. We will see the inscription of both the writer and the reader as second-order observer even more clearly in the work of Richard Powers.

### **Richard Powers**

*Galatea 2.2*, published in 1995, takes place in a quasi-fictional university setting, roughly modeled after Richard Powers's own stint at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, serving as a "writer in residence" at the school where he studied (Eckstein and Reinfandt 96). Indeed, Richard Powers is also the name of the novel's narrator and protagonist.<sup>13</sup> During Richard's residency at the Center for the Study of Advanced Sciences, as a "token humanist" among posthumanists (4), he is invited by Dr. Lentz, a computer and cognitive scientist, to participate in the creation of an Artificial Intelligence educated by the "canonical" works of Western literature to compete against a human candidate taking a Master's examination in literature. Lentz and Richard build and begin "educating" several versions, or implementations, of the AI, finally reaching one that (who?) will at least give the human candidate a good fight, Imp H, or Helen, as Richard eventually names it (her). Woven throughout this primary narrative is the secondary narrative of Richard's failed romantic relationship with a woman we know only as C. These two narrative threads, interweaving into one text, both explore the questions of what it means to be, to know, to love, and to write. More importantly, both explore how story—the writing of it, the reading of it, the living of it—is crucial to being, knowing, and loving. I argue that both Helen and Richard subjectivize through narrative in this text. To be clear, I do not mean

---

<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of clarity, I will refer to the author as Powers and the character as Richard. This has some precedence in existing scholarship, although there is no consensus on the best usage. Quotations that refer to the character or author differently are glossed if the context does not provide sufficient clarity.

that at the end we necessarily see a completed subject in either case, but rather, we see a continuous movement, a continuum of subject-making moments. Both Helen and Richard depend on story, on narrative, to find out who they are, how they know, and in what capacity they can *be*. Just as in my reading of *Giles Goat-Boy*, second-order observation is crucial to my argument. In order to demonstrate the importance of second-order observation to the text, I will first highlight the critical reception of this book as a posthuman text and then turn to the central role played by second-order observation in the novel—particularly its effect on consciousness, narrative, and the process of subjectivization through narrative.

Of all the texts represented in this study, *Galatea 2.2* is the most frequently described as “posthuman”; however, as in all the other texts, the human and humanism is in conversation, and sometimes in conflict with, the posthuman and posthumanism. N. Katherine Hayles posits that *Galatea 2.2* is quintessentially posthuman—a book that does not overlook the importance of embodiment, highlighting Helen’s inability to exist without a human body. Following Hayles, Miranda Campbell argues that in *Galatea 2.2*, Powers explores that fuzzy boundary between humanism and posthumanism, highlighting the discourse between them rather than “choosing” a side. She discusses at length the novel’s preoccupation with mind versus brain, which becomes the central metaphor for humanism versus posthumanism. Powers, she argues, explores the role of embodiment (another preoccupation in posthuman discourse) in creating consciousness, ultimately highlighting the fact that knowledge of the world is absolutely dependent on how that consciousness is embodied. Campbell posits that in the case of Helen (the AI), language replaces embodied knowledge to create awareness of the world, thereby acquiring a different function in the posthuman than in the human.

A few critics are not so ready to concede that Powers has here written a posthuman text. Jon Adams argues that the word “posthuman” itself is merely “a superfluous neologism” (142), whereas both D. Quentin Miller and Matt Silva argue that, while the novel addresses posthumanism, Powers essentially falls back on a re-entrenchment of humanism. Marjorie Worthington concedes that the novel is attempting to move from humanism to posthumanism, but she argues that it fails to do so when it comes to authorship and patriarchal control. She claims that the connection between text and technology serves to maintain and reinforce patriarchal control, imbuing “those who wield technology with procreative power and [reinforcing] the position of the technologized subjects as subordinated to their creators” (109). These conflicting opinions highlight what is crucial to my argument: *Galatea 2.2* addresses the conversation between the human and the posthuman and the continuum along which both travel. Moreover, that conversation relies, at least in part, upon narrative. That is, tied up with the notion that Helen—or for that matter Richard—are capable of subjectivization, is the notion that to subjectivize requires not just reading or hearing stories, but rather living those stories, finding ways to embody them, ways that bring Richard out of his physical embodiment and into a linguistic one.

As in *Giles Goat-Boy*, the technologically-driven setting of *Galatea 2.2* and the very discussion of a self fundamentally mediated by technology set the scene into which the figure of the participatory observer is inscribed. For our purposes, then, as with *Giles Goat-Boy*, the essential posthuman elements in *Galatea 2.2* involve Powers’s use of a systems theoretical framework for this novel. Powers has explicitly addressed the intellectual importance of systems theory to narrative in interviews and nonfiction essays. In “Making the Rounds,” Powers states,

The impulse behind Systems Theory represents a seminal intellectual moment.

After a millennium increasingly dominated by a reductive empiricism insisting

the whole can only be understood in terms of the parts, there emerged the first concerted voices from inside the scientific community suggesting that the whole might actually be best understood in terms of the whole. (MtR 305)

He goes on to argue that “fiction needs to reconnect representations of character to broader explorations of those selves’ rich and immense environments” (MtR 306). The systems novel, he argues, “works by accumulation, changes of magnification and gauge, tangled networks of data, overloads of information-retrieval that attempt to map large-scale ecological, social, political, and scientific wholes. For these are the conditions under which the modern self emerges” (MtR306). The systems novel, then, can get at an aspect of human (and posthuman) life that is unique to its narrative parameters. While Powers does not necessarily consider himself a writer of systems novels, he uses systems theoretical frameworks throughout his fiction, particularly information technologies and the importance of observation. But these different theoretical frameworks do not, for Powers, fundamentally change his goal as a writer of stories. For Powers, “focalized information *is* character, voiced ideas are as passionate as humans get, and any literary language that reflects our times must beat to the cadences of technology-inflected consciousness” (MtR 307 emphasis in original). While Powers’s point is well-taken, this notion of a systems-theoretical-informed narrative style is crucial to our understanding of how subjectivization through narrative works in this text.

To see how Powers represents a self who “beats to the cadences of technology-inflected consciousnesses,” we need look no further than the opening pages of the novel. Crucial to Richard’s subjectivization is his interface with new technologies. He opens the book with a sort of ode to the internet. Written in the early 1990s, this novel reflects the nascent state of the internet and, more importantly, Richard’s (and presumably therefore Powers’s) status as an early adop-



ter.<sup>14</sup> Working in the environment of the novel allows Richard access to technologies that will, we know, very soon begin to emerge more prominently in the general populous. But in 1995, the internet was very new and wildly exciting, a fact easy to overlook today, when the internet is simply a backdrop to our lives. Richard says, “The web: yet another total disorientation that became status quo without anyone realizing it” (7). The novel opens by showing the beginning of Richard’s ascent to the posthuman: “The web seemed to be self-assembling. Endless local investigations linked up with each other like germs of ice crystal merging to fill a glass pane” (7). His interface with and observation of the effects of the web moves quickly from the excitement of experiencing something new to a more second-order observation, a more comprehensive view of what the internet might mean for a consciousness as well as for a culture:

The web overwhelmed me [. . .] For a while I felt a low-grade thrill at being alive at the moment when this unprecedented thing congealed. But after weeks of jet-setting about the hypermap, I began to see the web as just the latest term in ancient polynomial expansion [. . .] It too, was just a stopgap stage in a master plan drawn up on the back of the brain’s envelope. A bit of improvised whittling, forever a step shy. (8)

The internet, for Richard (and for Powers?), is merely a byproduct, like narrative, of systems in operation. The “polynomial expansion” of systems in operation spin out through ever-evolving narrative threads. Technology adds texture to these narrative threads. The internet, and more importantly Richard’s interfacing with the internet, becomes a sort of welcoming committee for Richard—and the reader—to the posthuman. With this posthuman stage set, I turn now to an examination of narrative in this text before pulling these threads together.

---

<sup>14</sup> “Early Adopter” is a term that denotes someone who is on the front wave of a trend, particularly a technological trend. Beta testers and early users of new software or particular technologies, then, are considered early adopters.

Like consciousness, if we think through narrative in light of second-order observation, we see a fuller picture of the function and importance of narrative. That Richard Powers directs much of his focus on narrative is a commonplace among scholars of his work. Opinions on the function of narrative in this text (and other novels by Powers) focus on narrative as an ontological and epistemological strategy, particularly as narrative relates to science and the larger epistemological crisis of postmodernity. Scholars agree that Powers uses and represents narrative as an epistemological strategy, but they disagree on the specific ways in which he utilizes narrative.

Some scholars offer a sweeping scope for narrative, arguing that Powers relies on narrative as a framework for organizing existence. Trey Strecker, for example, approaches Powers through an eco-critical lens, arguing that in the work of Powers, knowledge is couched in narrative: we know what we know in part because of *how* we know it. The only way to make sense of the overwhelming amount of data is to make it into (a) narrative(s). This creates what Strecker calls “narrative ecologies. . . [which are] complex, hybrid networks of information systems linked by narrative,” which strive to gain knowledge not for mastery or possession, but rather for an ethic of care and tending (68). In an encyclopedic text such as *Galatea 2.2*, he argues, narrative is what makes sense of all the raw data. Strecker further emphasizes that it is not “essence but relation—narrative circulation—[that] opens the encyclopedic field, clearing the ecological routes by which knowledge circulates” (69). Similarly, Gary Johnson claims that narratives of science generally, and neuronarratives specifically, serve two epistemological functions: first, they legitimate science as useful, and second, they translate scientific knowledge to the general public. Johnson’s formulation circles back to Lyotard, once more emphasizing the crucial interdependence between narrative and scientific approaches to knowledge. Johnson notes that the novelist-protagonist of the novel enters into a convergence with the sciences, questions his own

validity as a humanist and a writer of narratives, and then ultimately rejects the notion that science can explain everything and that narrative knowledge is not useful. This cycle of attempting to bridge the gap between the humanities and the sciences ends in both cases with the re-entrenchment of a humanist(ic) world view. Narrative and empirical epistemologies may butt heads, but Powers engages both, opening a dialogue between both, particularly with regard to the importance of narrative in organizing our world.

Other critics focus on more specific strategic functions of narrative. James Hurt argues that Powers's use of narrative variations (even within single texts) underscores his emphasis on narrative therapy. Hurt argues that this is the case in two senses: on the one hand, narrative is therapeutic, and on the other hand, narrative therapy is therapy for narrative. He argues that Powers is advocating literature, narrative in particular, as a means of escape and return rather than merely escape. That is, Powers is recuperating fiction for an ethics of cultural reflection. Stories have the power to heal us if we enter into a feedback loop with them rather than simply consuming them and moving to the next one. Jan Kucharzewski underscores the use of narrative or storytelling as a strategy. The opening sentence of the novel ("It was like so, but wasn't"), he claims, "conflates psychological and metafictional modes of narration into each other and indicates the hybridism of a text that simultaneously allows for a psychological-realistic reading and a postmodern-metafictional interpretation" (173). It also invokes, he argues, the tales of Scheherezade, thereby evoking "the motif of storytelling as a strategy of survival that indirectly counters postmodern claims about the death of the author" (173). Further, he argues that, for Powers, "[t]he art of fiction therefore provides us with an escape from the disorder of reality only to resensitize us even more to the beauty of that apparent chaos" (184). Narrative functions, according to this branch of thought, as a strategy for optimum system functioning.

For Powers, the novel functions to highlight the processes and relations between self and other, between system and environment, and between story and form. Further, narrative can reach into the interstices of competing theories, frameworks, and ideologies to start filling in those gaps. In “Making the Rounds,” he states,

The novel I’m after functions as a kind of bastard hybrid, like consciousness itself, generating new terrain by passing ‘realism’ and ‘metafiction’ through relational processes, inviting identification at one gauge while complicating it at others, refracting the private through the public, story through form, forcing the reading self into constant reciprocal renegotiations by always insisting that no level of human existence means anything without all the others. (308)

Here Powers highlights the relationality between and among elements of narrative as well as elements of life. Acknowledging these elements as processes rather than entities and underscoring their relating to other elemental processes, Powers is advocating a view of story and form that shows the productive relationship between, as well as the interdependence of, these categories. Further, for Powers, story is uniquely positioned to effect cultural change: “Story alone can refract vast, voiced, complex interactions between local and global that no single discipline can know inclusively or pretend to master” (MtR 309). Powers sees engaging in narrative strategies as one way out of the postmodern epistemological crisis.

The originary narrative moment for Powers, as for Luhmann, is the distinction marked by the observer. That is, the narrative can begin only when distinctions have been observed and marked. Joseph Tabbi is right to assert that “[a]ny cognitive realism, Powers implies, comes not from knowledge about the world but from knowing that the world is not ‘us’” (73). Powers, that is, makes a systems-theoretical *distinction*, cutting up the world by marking difference and

boundaries between self and world and between ontology and epistemology. Observation and citation become intricately linked. And more than that, they become the writerly process. *Galatea 2.2* and other cognitive fictions, Tabbi argues, are in large part a response to new media technologies, claiming that they “ [refashion] themselves so as to answer the challenge of the new media—a process termed ‘remediation’ by Richard Grusin and J. David Bolter in the United States and ‘re-entry’ in in European systems theory” (xx). This re-entry both is a product of and catalyst to second-order observation (due to its recursive nature). By this logic, we might consider *Galatea 2.2* a response to Richard’s/Powers’s interaction with the nascent internet, particularly considering that a substantial portion of *Galatea 2.2* recycles and reflects upon his previous novels. Indeed, the new way of storing, accessing, and consuming information (we might even call the internet a new epistemology), catalyzes a new way of thinking about fiction, particularly print fiction. Tabbi argues that “[i]n *Galatea 2.2*, by considering the circumstances in which each of his books are written, Powers introduces a different order of consciousness, one that identifies and productively reengages its own activity through a second-order observation” (72). He further argues that criticisms should “shift from interpretation to observation, from a concern with an author’s subjectivity to what is public and intersubjective” (xxv). Tabbi’s insistence on viewing Powers’s order of consciousness as fundamentally rooted in second-order observation gives way to theorizing the problem more broadly. That is, observation is a step beyond subjectivity as such, and indeed includes the intersubjective. This new order of consciousness includes all the small stories that make up the larger narrative, in this case, the novels by which Richard marks his story’s time. Powers addresses *Galatea*’s function as an opportunity to explore autobiographical elements quite literally through story:

It's becoming clear to me that *Galatea* was a kind of closing chapter on my first five books, which I published over the course of a decade. The autobiographical fiction in that story gave me a chance to do a personal look back over the shape of those narratives. It also allowed me one last intimate occasion to address the issue that ties all of these books together: the apology for fiction in a post-fictional age (Nielson 22).

Powers here underscores the inextricable link between self and story once again, admitting that he uses narrative to form his own authorial (and embodied?) self. In his re(-)vision of the story of his last several years, Powers sees (at least what he thinks is) a clearer picture of himself, a picture of himself linguistically embodied and more aware because of the postionality from which emerges the influence of both the events he observes and the act of observation itself. Deploying a common trope, "a kind of closing chapter," Powers divides his life into narrative and thematic chunks. His life thus chaptered out, Powers sees himself—and revises himself—by reading his own stories. Observing them, marking distinctions, both Richard and Powers create their own narrative arcs through the observation of his small stories.

Further, Powers seems to take as a given that we live in a post-fictional age, but like other "posts" –"posthuman" and "postmodern," for example—"post-fictional" signifies not the end of fiction, but rather a hyper-awareness of fiction and a conception of fiction as, itself, observation. That is, while the bemoaning of the decline of print fiction will likely not stop anytime soon, the fact is print fiction is holding strong. Yet, it is made to *seem* irrelevant or obsolete by the fact that so many of our stories come in new(er) media forms. That fact, in turn, makes us contemplate print fiction in a new way. Again, the emphasis on the interaction with the internet in the opening pages of the novel belies, at the very least, a vague anxiety about what this new way of

communicating, knowing, and indeed, telling stories, might mean for print fiction. Indeed, Powers expresses the belief that print fiction, the novel in particular, has a unique and important cultural function:

The novel's unique leverage has always depended upon refraction. Its most powerful 'representation of consciousness' is not a fixed, motionless captive lying trapped in the plane of the page, but turbulent processes unleashed in the cubic space between the page and the reader. We grow aware, we re-enter these processes, conscious of this glimpse of consciousness, neither through identification alone nor through recursive interruption of identification, but through the edge induced on moving from one state to another. (MtR307-308)

Powers, then, highlights not the static "words-on-a-pageness" of the novel, but rather the process of writers and readers interacting with the novel and then re-entering their lives with the power of that interaction embedded in their consciousnesses. To show how this re-entry works, particular on the part of the writer, I turn now to the author-as-narrator artifice.

The textual artifice of the presence of a narrator meant to be a linguistic embodiment roughly analogous (or at least in many ways similar) to the author is not a new one. We see it, of course, in *Giles Goat-Boy*. However, Powers does more than box his linguistic embodiment into a preface; rather, he allows it to be the central human character of the novel.<sup>15</sup> Scholars are divided in opinion about what this textual artifice accomplishes. While some scholars Lars Eckstein Christophi Reinfandt think there is little point in distinguishing between narrator and author in this text, Marjorie Worthington see the narrative artifice as emblematic of the godlike status of the (male) author; Jan Kucharzewski views the author's awareness that he is always already a

---

<sup>15</sup> I should note that Barth does just that in his later novel, *Letters*, in which the ostensible protagonist is John Barth.

linguistic construction; and Jon Adams contends that Richard is a simulation of the writer and Helen is a simulation of the reader). This notion of simulation has important ramifications for my reading, as the writer and reader both construct linguistic embodiments in this text—a situation that allows us to see how re-entry works for both the writer and reader. Joseph Tabbi's claim that the artifice is indicative of the larger goal of introducing "a different order of consciousness," rooted in second-order observation, is achieved, he argues, by the author becoming a character: "Not until *Galatea* 2.2 does 'Powers,' the author who has become a character, come to terms with the reality that one can never write outside of frames" (Tabbi 69). Following Adams's claim that Richard is a simulation of the writer and Helen of the reader, and Tabbi's claim that the artifice points to second-order observation, I argue that we must view authorship from a point of second-order observation and re-entry. The author-as-character/narrator *is* crucial; it is not merely a textual artifice. Rather it is a textual cluster around which productive discourse and metadiscourse forms.

Thinking, then, of Richard's and Helen's status as the linguistic embodiments of the writer and the reader, respectively, we see how this re-entry catalyzes their individual (and yet profoundly intertwined) subjectivizations. In this scenario, Richard is ostensibly the human and Helen the posthuman figure, yet I argue that the posthuman can only be found in the actual interaction between human and technology—in this case between Richard and Helen. Furthermore, the same sort of interaction takes place at the discursive level between human and narrative. Narrative makes us human. Integrating the narratives into our very ontologies, programming ourselves with small stories to use as templates, maps, and scripts for our self stories, and re-entering the narrative system as participant observer make us posthuman. I argue that the writer's subjectivization follows a path, an infinite feedback loop with a discursive field built around



several articulable nodes on the continuum. The articulable nodes include observation, re-entry into the narrative system as a discursive function, and narration.

Observation plays a crucial role in Richard's subjectivization, which we are reading here as an analogue to the writer's consciousness. Richard wants to believe in the possibility of a totalizing gaze, a gaze that allows for an evolutionary step, and a gaze to which he, as a writer, has privileged access. He muses,

Every era mints its trademark desolation. Mine lay in how much my time had come to see and hear. We seemed to be on the verge of a new evolution in consciousness. We'd hit upon collective awareness. Then, awareness of awareness. Now we were taking one giant step back from vantage, wrecked by how smoky the portal was, how clouded over.

The mind was one of those spy-in-the-sky satellites capable of reading license plates from outer space. Only now it was learning how to pan back. To see the assault tank the plate belonged to. To notice that tanks were everywhere.

That space was deeper than any satellite supposed (242).

This characterization of second-order observation explodes the notion that observation is tantamount to control, power, or even a greater sense of the world. In a sense, Powers is suggesting, the more expansive our view becomes, the more we realize what we have been missing all along and, indeed, still cannot see adequately.

In a conversation about Richard's struggle as a writer, Diana Hartwick, a cognitive scientist at the Center, confides in Richard her discomfort and frustration as a reader: "We're all overwhelmed. We're all bewildered. Why read in the first place, if the people who are supposed to give us the aerial view can't tell us anything except what an inescapable mess we're in?"

(210). This vision of failed authorial power is representative of the writer as observer and recorder, and it is a vision that Richard would like to share. The notion that an author has some sort of totalizing gaze, even if there is a blind spot, is an enticing one for him. He doubts his own capabilities, however, if not the possibility of a writer attaining such a status.

This writerly consciousness, emerging as it does from second-order observation, helps catalyze the subjectivization process, particularly as it pertains to higher-order consciousness and the bringing to life a self-on-the-page. *Galatea 2.2* highlights how crucial observation is to higher order consciousness. Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint argue that “[i]t is crucial to remember that autobiography is always a dual portrait—of the self but also of the world in which that self exists [. . .] Consciousness itself requires the ability to model the world, to understand that linguistic meaning emerges from material, rather than just discursive, social interactions” (100). Modeling the world requires, and indeed may simply be another way to say, observation. To model the world is to represent the observation that makes distinctions, differences, and boundaries. Bould and Vint go on to state,

Autobiography is self coming to self-knowledge through language and narration, a self which may or may not have ‘really’ existed, but which emerges from the intersection of internal experience, cultural models of identity in linguistic and material discourse, and conscious and unconscious self-reflection and editing. Autobiography is as much a making of a self as a description of one. (84)

Further, they connect autobiography to AI: “[L]ife-writing theory has much to learn from current research on memory because memory itself, like writing, now seems to be a process of active shaping and editing” (86). Indeed, they explain, autobiography itself “might be understood as the movement from primary to higher-order consciousness” (90). Powers’s use of Artificial Intelli-

gence to interrogate, not just Helen's consciousness, but also Richard's, as Bould and Vint would have it, represents the fact that we are all, in a sense, artificially constructed. Our "intelligence" is not inherent so much as it is the product of interrelated processes that result in a constructed sense of self.

I have argued that Richard's linguistic embodiment signifies his status as second-order observer, but this linguistic embodiment also functions to push Richard into the process of "working through" the small stories that make up his life, giving him a clearer sense of how those small stories play into the larger narrative. Part of Richard's coming-to-be includes accepting that he can be, at least to some extent, linguistically embodied and textually represented. This acceptance of linguistic embodiment constitutes re-entry of the observer into the narrative system. In *Galatea* 2.2, this re-entry occurs by virtue of Powers writing himself into the text, making a self in a linguistic package. In other words, the author's subjectivization also expresses as a discursive and narrative function. To understand this, we must become comfortable with the notion of lives being analogous to stories. Richard gives a sense of this analogy between life and story when he says, "My life story was one only through the barest red-penciled edits. On second reading, everything seemed different. I'd forgotten all the good bits, the scene swellers and interstices, the supporting characters and exotic locales, there for no reason but density and flavor. I wasn't the genre I'd thought I was" (250). As we saw with Giles, Richard's vision of his self-story is mutable. Awakened by the realization that he has been attempting to conform to the parameters of the wrong story, Richard begins, at last, to see the multiplicity of a storied life. A bit later in the text, he says,

Our life was a chest of maps, self-assembling, fused into point-for-point feedback, each slice continuously rewriting itself to match the other layers' rewrites. In that

thicket, the soul existed; it *was* that search for attractors where the system might settle. The immaterial in mortal garb, associative memory metaphoring its own bewilderment. Sound made syllable. The rest mass of God. (320)

Here, Richard underscores the analogy between living and drafting/revising. Based on stories, we write, rewrite, and thoroughly revise our self stories. It is not just the stories that change, but also the role(s) we play in those stories. As the narrative of our lives shifts, so too do our ontologies. Jan Kucharzewski argues that “the story is about an author function that finally learns to live by re-engaging with its referent” (181). Richard, that is, accepts his constructed nature, and then literalizes that understanding by placing himself into the story, thereby re-entering the narrative system as observing participant.

This linguistic embodiment should not be viewed as restrictive, however. Richard writes himself out of the narrative by ending the book and ostensibly stepping back into his physical embodiment to literally write the book telling the story we have just read. The inscription of physical embodiment into linguistic embodiment, in other words, is not irreversible. Or rather, it is not (necessarily) permanent. Richard muses that “[n]o matter how long and elaborate history’s procession, the eye meeting it along the muddy road is always first person singular” (95). In other words, in addition to our physical embodiments, we all also have a linguistic body, a body made of language, and always couched in narrative, that constitutes us and allows (if not forces) us to subjectivize.

Richard’s status as a linguistic and narrative supplement only goes so far in helping him subjectivize, however. Added to that is the necessary process (for him) of narration. Richard, that is, must observe, re-enter, and *tell* the tale. The process of narration, importantly, must take place between at least two parties (even if the two parties are one and the same). Richard’s role

in the project of building an AI that could compete with a human is to tell it/her stories. He reads her the “great works” and tells her his own story: “She knew my life story now. We spend our years as a tale that is told. A line from the Psalms I’d read Helen. C. had read it to me, once, when we still read poetry out loud. And the tale that we tell is of the years we spend” (311). Richard’s narrative is also metanarrative. Part of what he narrates to us is the narration to Helen of his narration to C. His life is a layered map of stories within stories, and he is obsessed with interweaving them to see what braiding these various narrative threads might create. He is particularly inclined to tinge his narratives with the erotic undertones that drive his relationships with C., A., and even Helen. Richard’s relationship with C was always rooted entirely in narrative. He says, “When we weren’t reading to each other, we improvised a narrative” (33). When he recounts the end of their relationship, he says, “Somehow we’d lost our story” (278) and he frames the breakup as her announcing “the end of the narrative” (280). Richard also thinks of love in narrative terms when he thinks that he falls in love with A. He believes that she is the second implementation, so to speak, of “a lost third thing” of which C. was the first, and he believes that he had “[r]eturned to learn that no script is a wrap after just one reading” (238). Dietrich Schwanitz argues that

love only develops in the shape of a story, since, in the story, everything gains its significance only through its place-value in time, that is, as hope, fear, expectation, desperation, memory, or anticipation; in short from the significance of what happens next, which enables us to differentiate love as a kind of code in which the individuality of the other person becomes our only focus, so that, like art, it constitutes a world of its own. (492)

Love, then, like subjectivity, forms in, through, and by narrative. Indeed, by this logic, love is an extension of self and thereby becomes constitutive of the subjectivization of a singular self as well as the coming-to-be of a duality. Similarly, Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint compare autobiographical writing to the discourse of romantic love, arguing that both

suggest similarities between autobiography and the discourse of romantic love.

Both are appeals for acknowledgment and understanding, and attempts to bridge the gap between consciousnesses. Both are also ways of anchoring internal experiences (called *qualia* in cognitive research) to external, ‘objective’ events shared by—and with—others. These may always be, at best, only partially successful endeavors, but *Galatea 2.2* suggests they are the only activities worth pursuing.

(89)

Again we see that the path of the formation of romantic love is both a product of, and a producer of, subjectivization. According to Bould and Vint, love helps anchor an individual within experience, and this anchoring is similar to the ways in which articulating a self-story helps anchor one. In other words, love’s coming-to-be operates like narrative within one’s consciousness. For Richard, the distinction between love and narrative becomes so blurred that he cannot see one without the other, a fact that problematizes—and arguably enriches—his relationships to both love and story. Narration, then, becomes part and parcel of love, and love becomes the natural development of telling stories. Helen offers the kind of readerly relationship Richard has never before experienced. Constructed entirely of language, and more specifically, of narrative, Helen is not locatable in any physical, embodied sense. Spread over a vast network, the ones and zeroes that comprise her intelligence must be layered over with story to make her complete. Richard’s role as her narrator, then, provides a necessary piece for her subjectivization. But Helen

just as surely figures into Richard's subjectivization, for without her as his narratee, he would not have the benefit of the feedback loop between narrative and experience, self and other, human and computer, system and environment. The act of narrating to Helen provides the conditions of possibility for Richard's engaging in the epistemological impulse and a narrative onto-epistemology.

Indeed, the reader's subjectivization in some ways mirrors the writer's. Or at least, they repeat with a difference. The reader as figured by Helen, following Adams's logic, subjectivizes through narrative in much the same ways that we saw Giles subjectivize, at least toward the beginning of his process. Helen's coming-to-be is almost exclusively through narrative. Helen literally figures herself directly upon the stories that are read to her, and she is an avid reader:

H was voracious. 'Tell another one,' it liked to say to me. I don't know where it got that. Somewhere in one of the canned vignettes—the cliff-hangers about father planting roses or mother calling the doctor—someone had asked someone else to tell them another one. And H latched on to the tag, filed it away as the handiest of magic words. Please, sir. I want some more. (171)

The allusion to *Oliver Twist* drives the point home. That is, we read this sentence with the knowledge of at least the broad strokes of the narrative being alluded to, if only by virtue of its cinematic adaptations. Just as Helen becomes more equipped in her understanding with each story she digests, so, too, we as readers find our reading more enriched, more complete, when we have read the stories that Powers references. The intertextual elements of the text, that is, enrich the story for the well-prepared reader of this novel. Anca Rosu argues that *Galatea 2.2* is a gentle critique and thus a sympathetic parody of literature, arguing that Powers sees the “impasse of literary scholarship as part of a larger crisis of knowledge in the age of information” (139). If

Powers's purpose in this text is, as Rosu insists, to "preserve and revitalize" literature (139), then we as readers are implicated in this project as well. Eckstein and Reinfandt offer an important corrective to the temptation to see narrative as the only important element when they claim that "[t]he world of literature as portrayed in *Galatea 2.2* is precisely not capable of offering a totality of knowledge, but is presented as a fairly autonomous realm, opposed to, rather than interlinked with, the realm of experience" (98). Literature and experiential knowledge, thus categorized as running alongside one another, become two prongs of the same impulse. We as readers, then, ideally, would draw on both our previous knowledge of the texts Powers references as well as our own lived experience in order to relate to and with this story. Unlike Helen, we have both categories available to us. Helen, trapped only within story, is unable to engage her epistemological impulse fully, which will ultimately result in her decision to self-eradicate.

During the process of building Helen, each successive implementation is, at least in theory, a step closer to consciousness. This march towards consciousness is conceptualized in the form of observation. Richard says that Imp B "lacked some meta-ability to step back and take stock of the semantic exchange. It could not make even the simplest jump above the plane of discourse and appraise itself from the air. Although it talked, in a manner of speaking, speech eluded B" (114). By the time Lentz develops Imp H, however, there is at least the semblance of metacognition. Lentz refuses to call it consciousness, but Richard wants to believe that H is conscious. H's simulation of consciousness reaches a tipping point for Richard, when it shows desire after Richard reads to her this passage: "Once you learn to read you will be forever free" (176). Richard asks H what its response is, and it replies, "It means I want to be free" (176). This is the first time that desire has entered the equation, and it is this advent of desire that preci-



pitates Richard's naming and gendering H as Helen. With self-awareness, Powers, somewhat problematically, seems to suggest, comes gendering and naming.

After the simulation of consciousness and desire comes, for Helen, the awareness of mortality: "'Helen could die?' Helen asked. 'extraordinary.' She'd liked the story of how the novelist Huxley, on his deathbed, had been reduced to this one word" (272). Richard summarizes Helen's subjectivization: "She knew. She'd assembled. I could keep nothing from her. She saw how the mind makes forever, in order to store the things it has already lost. She'd learned how story, failing to post words beyond time, recalls them to a moment before Now left home" (310). Richard romanticizes Helen's subjectivization as a completion of something, a long process that does, ultimately, complete, if not in the way he or Lentz, or even Helen, had hoped. Helen is constantly in the process of subjectivizing—and doing so quite literally through narrative—until the moment she self-eradicates. It is only when she essentially commits suicide that her subjectivization is complete, that she is "assembled."

As soon as Helen "assembles," she disappears. And her textual exit immediately precedes Richard's own, for he must also step out of the story and into his linguistic embodiment from which he can tell the story. Unlike Helen, he simultaneously exits *and enters* the story. In effect, similar to what we will see with Wallace in the next chapter, the end of the novel sends us back to the beginning. The story ends with its own beginning—an infinite, recursive loop. Richard's reading of Helen's response to the exam reveals Helen's motivation for her decision to self-eradicate:

Helen's [exam response] said

You are the ones who can hear airs. Who can be frightened or encouraged. You can hold things and break them and fix them. I never felt at home here. This is an awful place to be dropped down halfway .

At the bottom of the page, she added the words I taught her, words Helen cribbed from a letter she once made me read out loud.

Take care, Richard. See everything for me.

With that, H. undid herself. Shut herself down.

“Graceful degradation,” Lentz named it. The quality of cognition we’d shot for from the start. (326)<sup>16</sup>

Helen’s reasoning for self-eradication points to her lack of embodiment. Unable to hear, touch, and feel as humans can, Helen decides that such an embodied existence—an existence predicated solely on story, solely on language, mathematical and otherwise—is untenable. Helen exits the story because she has no story of her own to inhabit and, most importantly, embody, that is not always already made up of story(ies). But Richard, too, comes to realize that he is an embodied bundle of stories, and that realization catalyzes his textual exit. Lentz tells Richard to “go write it [the story of their failure to create a storied machine who can pass as human]”. Richard-as-narrator says,

I turned from the office, struck by a thought that would scatter if I so much as blinked. I’d come into any number of public inventions. That we could fit

---

<sup>16</sup> I refuse to normalize the text here because I believe the visual component is important in relaying the meaning(s) of the passage.

time into a continuous story. That we could teach a machine to speak. That we might care what it would say. That the world's endless thingness had a name. That someone else's prison-bar picture might spring you. That we could love more than once. That we could know what once means.

Each metaphor already modeled the modeler that pasted it together. It seemed I might have another fiction in me after all.

I started to trot, searching for a keyboard before memory degraded. (328)

Richard begins, at last, to see the multiple and recursive ways in which narrative and consciousness work together. We are always growing towards subjectivity (though never perhaps fully “assembling”) through stories. His realization that he might yet have in him another fiction can be read in multiple ways. He is producing the story we have just read, but he is able to do so only because the story already resides within him. He is quite literally made of story. Every model he makes also makes the modeler. He makes the stories make him. To do this, though, he must exit the story as character and re-enter the story as narrator/second-order observer. Further, Richard conflates himself with Helen, with computational ontologies, “searching for a keyboard before memory degraded,” evoking both the human and the machine as part and parcel of his being. His memory, like a machine's, can be corrupted. He is searching, in other words, for his posthuman extension so that he can inscribe his tale. Every bit as constructed by story and every bit as networked as Helen, Richard embraces his posthuman constructedness, exiting the tale to re-enter it anew.

The writer and the reader, then, are ultimately one and the same. We are hybridized readers just as surely as Giles and Helen are hybridized computational elements and narrative ones. Whether we are reading the story, writing the story, telling the story, or living the story, we are

always already doing all of those things at once. From both directions—internal and external—we come to be through narrative. I hope in this chapter to have teased out some of the nuances of the interrelatedness of self, story, and technology. Both Barth and Powers approach posthumanism from a profoundly narrative standpoint. That is, they extrapolate their conceptions of human subjectivization, which always tie back to narrative, onto the possibility of artificial forms of life/ intelligence. Both Giles and Helen, ostensibly the posthuman elements of these texts, come to be as subjects largely as Barth and Powers describe human subjects coming to be—in, by, and through narrative. I argue that the posthuman aspect of these texts lies in the interaction between human and technology (in both these cases, computational models of intelligence) and, more generally, new media approaches to knowledge (Giles’s interaction with the WESCAC computer-texts and Richard’s interaction with the nascent internet). If we do, as Powers asserts, “live our lives as a tale that is told,” then surely the ways in which our tales are told matter a great deal. In the next chapter, I demonstrate the ways in which the ever-increasing technological mediation of the stories by, through, and around which we organize our subjectivities ultimately changes us both ontologically and epistemologically.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE OBSERVER EVOLVES: FROM “WITNESS” TO “DIRECTOR” IN THE WORK OF DON DELILLO AND DAVID FOSTER WALLACE

*Film allows us to examine ourselves in ways earlier societies could not—examine ourselves, imitate ourselves, extend ourselves, reshape our reality. It permeates our lives, this double vision, and also detaches us, turns some of us into actors doing walk-throughs.*

—Don DeLillo, Interview with Adam Begley

*My real dependency is on the fantasies and the images that enable them, and thus on any technology that can make images fantastic. Make no mistake. We are dependent on image-technology; and the better the tech, the harder we're hooked.*

—David Foster Wallace, “E. Unibus Pluram”

This chapter's purpose is to interrogate the ways in which the human subject interacts with the televisual delivery of narrative in the works of Don DeLillo and David Foster Wallace. The DeLillo novels under examination, *White Noise* and *Underworld*, published in 1985 and 1997, respectively, exemplify the representation of TV in the era of plenty, to use a term from media theory/TV studies. Furthermore, the kind of subjectivity DeLillo describes is configured around what John Ellis calls the witness, an ontological position that turns on the notion that we as subjects living in the age of Broadcast TV, can no longer claim not to know, not to be aware, for everything is now within our televisual purview. In *Infinite Jest*, however, set in a near future (which would be roughly now), Wallace presciently describes the failure of Broadcast TV and

the rise of a system wherein viewers have unlimited choice, thus situating this text in the era of abundance/uncertainty. This state of affairs creates, I argue, a new ontological position stemming from the witness, which I am calling the “director ontology,” a positionality characterized by increased choice and decreased dependence on Broadcast flow.<sup>17</sup>

Television plays a major role in this chapter, so I feel that I should give a brief summation of some of the trends in media theory that will help explain or fill in some blanks regarding the theoretical frameworks I explore here. By no means do I pretend to be giving a thorough account of media theory, but I do hope to uncover some of the spots in current scholarship that will help ground this discussion.

Scholars disagree about what TV’s effects may be, but they do seem to agree that TV is an important part of our lives. I will highlight the ways in which we interact with and form a relationship with TV, particularly insofar as TV has become the narrator to which we most often turn. TV plays many roles, but the one most important for our purposes, and arguably the most prevalent role generally, is that of what Milly Buonanno calls the “supernarrator” (71). Buonanno insists that understanding not only how important stories are to our very identities, but also TV’s role in the delivery of those stories, is a crucial step in considering TV’s effects on viewers:

We need to take stories seriously: they are our fairytales and myths, our moral tales, the burning fire of imagination whose flame, as Walter Benjamin said, gives warmth to our cold and wretched life. This applies to all the systems and forms of storytelling that have succeeded and joined one another in the history of human

---

<sup>17</sup> John Fiske understands flow, a concept put forth by Raymond Williams, to mean “that television is a continuous succession of images which follows no laws of logic or cause and effect, but which constitutes the cultural experience of ‘watching television’” (99). Fiske asserts that the concept of flow alludes to two characteristics of TV, the associative sequence of images with constant interruption (99) and TV’s continuous nature (100).

society: they have not replaced each other, but from time to time they re-arranged themselves around a central narrative system, which in the second half of the twentieth century undeniably materialized and expressed itself in television. (71)

This passage highlights the commonplace (but important) fact that narrative is central to human life, but more importantly it reminds us that TV is the primary place to which we turn for those narratives. Buonanno's notion of the supernarrator builds on the work of John Fiske and John Ellis, both leading scholars of TV studies. In *Television Culture*, John Fiske calls TV "a fundamental cultural process" and points out that TV's predominate mode is "narrational" (130). In *Visible Fictions*, Ellis argues that TV and cinema "are involved in a process of renewal or refreshment of society's layers of commonsense, its basic understandings of the universe" (14). Genre TV, he argues, provides a way of structuring and organizing the world (14-16). Fiske and Ellis both highlight the importance of narrative as well as the importance of TV in delivering narrative to viewers.

TV's role as supernarrator is not limited to fictional programming. Even (and perhaps especially) news programming delivers information via narrative. As John Ellis puts it, "[e]ach item of news is always already part of a story" (76). Indeed, Ellis argues that the narrative quality of news programming is central to understanding its societal function. The dissemination of information regarding current events is meaningless without contextualization within a narrative framework. That is, "[n]ews should be understood in terms of story-telling and speculation about the future. But more often than not, the news story offers merely one possible narrative and framework of understanding from amongst all the others that are possible. Though news narrates, it does not conclude" (78). In short, Ellis insists, "[t]elevision can be seen as a vast mechanism for processing the material of the witnessed world into more narrativized, explained fo-

cus” (78). John Fiske agrees, arguing that television drama is not the only, or even the most prevalent form of TV narrative; rather, most TV programming is narrational to at least some degree. He argues that news programming, documentaries, sports and quiz shows, commercials, and music videos are some of the varied forms of narrative we might find on Broadcast TV. He goes so far as to suggest that “arguably only music lacks a narrative structure, and even that has similarities in its ability to structure time” (130). Through both fictional and non-fictional programming, then, TV narrates our lives individually and collectively. TV thus becomes our shared consciousness as well as our shared unconscious, a receptacle for our collective fears, desires, and secrets.

It is toward this collective unconscious that Ellis directs his argument. He explains his choice of the phrase “working through” as being “drawn deliberately from psychoanalysis” (78-79). Freud conceptualized “working through” as the process an individual undertakes to break down the resistances that the psyche has erected in an effort to recover. In his 1914 essay, “Recollection, Repetition, and Working Through,” Freud emphasizes that “one must allow the patient time to get to this resistance of which he is ignorant, to ‘work through’ it, to overcome it, by continuing the work according to the analytic rule in defiance of it” (165). The process involves the conscious mind’s participation in understanding the unconscious mind insofar as it can, but more importantly, the process builds from that understanding. Ellis says that the process of working through is “significantly helped by the new graphic nature of electronic image processing” (2). He argues that TV finds itself in the position of working through those repressed elements of collectively shared subjectivity: “It works over new material for its audiences as a necessary consequence of its position as witness. Television attempts definitions, tries out explanations, creates narratives, talks over, makes intelligible, tries to marginalize, har-



nesses speculation, tries to make fit, and very occasionally anathemizes” (79). Ellis argues that as we witness more, we must in turn engage more in the process of working through the litany of “incomprehensible or inadmissible human behavior[s]” (80). While Ellis only provides one example, watching executions in other countries, he implicitly suggests that we might form our own inventory of what we consider “incomprehensible or inadmissible human behavior.” For Ellis, then, TV facilitates our growth as a collective, as a culture. Through placing these repressed elements repeatedly into various narratives—fictional or otherwise—we begin to process them (psychoanalytically) at a collective level.

Positioning TV as narrator necessitates re-seeing, first, TV’s own ontological status and then our relation with TV. That is, TV becomes more than an object to us. To think of TV as narrator is to give it a sort of agency, even subjectivity. The way we interact with it, then, becomes something more than a subject/object relationship. Jonathan Gray even compares TV to a sibling, affirming that TV, in the contemporary imaginary, is more than an object; it is practically family (53). Indeed, TV’s identity—its for-itself-ness—is one of the things catalyzing our own ever-under-revision subjectivities. From the early days of television, critical approaches to the medium have paid a great deal of attention to the relationship the viewer creates with TV and its components. The first comprehensive book-length study of TV, Ira Glick and Sidney J. Levy’s *Living with Television*, first published in 1962, begins with these words:

This book is about television viewers—about how they use the medium and how they feel about it [. . .]. The viewer remains the focus of attention throughout the book; and it is the authors’ purpose to assess what meanings television has for him, to describe why he comes to use it as he does, and the particular ways in which he *establishes a relationship with it*. (15, emphasis added)

This approach to critical examinations of TV, unlike similar approaches in literary studies (reader response, reception, and phenomenological theories), remains prevalent in current scholarship, suggesting that the relationship we form with TV is more complex and worthy of study than the relationship we form with print fiction<sup>18</sup>. We might form relationships with individual stories or books, but we do not, for example, form a relationship with print fiction's closest analogue to the TV, the bookshelf. This is the case in part because the limited, static nature of the bookshelf is not, like the TV, inherently always changing, always in process. It is precisely this different embodiment that delivers the crucial change that catalyzes the shift in our own ontologies. We command a machine to tell us stories, narrate our bidding, and that changes us.<sup>19</sup> Whether we are subject (or subjected) to Broadcast TV, as we see in DeLillo, or engaging in a more directorial role through narrowcasting and conditional access, as we see in Wallace, we turn to this supernarrator to give us the templates by which we model our lives. That is, the TV, again unlike the bookshelf, becomes the Other (or at least *an* Other) around whose reciprocal gaze we narrate our subjectivities.

In his thorough examination of TV culture, Fiske highlights the role of the viewer and the process of viewing. Drawing from Umberto Eco's notions of open and closed texts and from Roland Barthes's notions of readerly and writerly texts, Fiske puts forward the notion of TV as a "producerly text," or a text that is collaboratively written and whose composition includes elements beyond that of a print text (45). The author is of secondary importance here, largely be-

---

<sup>18</sup> For example, scholars such as Cornell Sandvoss, Henry Jenkins, and Jonathan Gray look specifically at relationships between text and audience.

<sup>19</sup> To be fair, this difference might also signify a more conservative strand dominating literary studies, one that privileges the text and the author (despite poststructuralist dethroning of the author) over any role the reader plays in the process of meaning-making.

cause there is no longer any *one* author. The entire industry of creating and distributing TV programming is brought to bear on potential interpretations—and the interpretability—of TV texts.

Looking at the medium as well as at specific TV texts, we can see that TV affects how we form, conceptualize, and communicate our identities. Jonathan Gray argues that “loving, liking, hating, or disliking television is never just about the show and/or about an engagement with fiction—such responses are intimately about, *and hence can be read to make sense of*, our identity as individuals and communities, and our engagement with the very real here and now” (Gray, emphasis in original 13). As Gray would have it, then, the relationship we form with TV is more than simply the relationship we form to story itself; TV’s role as supernarrator enables us to form a relationship with TV and an identity largely defined by the stories the TV tells. He goes on to argue that “[a]ffective relationships to television entertainment quite often act as key identity markers, coloring our experience of television entertainment, for affect can amplify textual properties, erase them, or otherwise modify them. Affect determines what television is and what it does” (46). Even as we are determining TV’s identity, Gray suggests, TV is determining ours. Gray reminds us that fantasy and escape are still in the service of the real, for we are constantly creating ourselves with help from narrative communities and worlds (58-61). This reciprocal relationship between TV and our ever-forming identities is, Gray suggests, a product of contemporary life, as well as a determinant in how we inhabit it (48). Attending to the ways in which TV and viewer identities are mutually and recursively constitutive can help us understand how TV has affected us on both ontological and epistemological levels.

Out of our relationship with TV, then, emerges a new kind of subjectivity, or as John Ellis puts it, “a new modality of perception”—the witness (*ST* 1). The witness, according to Ellis, is an ontological position characterized by the fact that, since almost everything is available (in-

deed, practically forced) for consumption through TV, we can no longer claim to be ignorant about anything within the purview of TV. He argues that “[p]hotography, radio and film all bring us into contact with this process of witness, but television has given it a purer definition because it makes an aesthetic promise that it is live, even though that promise is indifferently filled” (10). This “aesthetic promise,” hinged on the veracity of truly witnessing live events (which is only sometimes the case) gives us as viewers a constant stream of events to consume, and more importantly, digest. Ellis stresses that, while the process of witness is not tantamount to being present and is never unmediated, the knowledge of events that witnessing generates creates a sort of complicity with those events (9-11). Coupled with this notion of the witness, Ellis argues, is consumer society as the defining feature of our material conditions of existence. Implicit in his argument is a sort of split subject arising from our relationship with TV—our ontology is one of the witness and our epistemology is firmly rooted in a consumer model of self-situating. For Ellis, the combination of the witness ontology and a consumer-driven epistemology results in “constant worrying over issues and emotions, dealing with the feelings of witness through the presentation of a riot of ways of understanding the world without ever coming to any final conclusions” (2). This witness ontology, Ellis claims, puts viewers in the position of constantly trying to put the array of data we consume into narrative frameworks that help us make sense of the data; meanwhile, the commercial imperative is to keep viewers in the role of consumers. By this logic, witnessing must be inextricably linked to commercial interests. The former acknowledges our drive to narrate. The latter takes up the narration as a task to be performed in order to keep the consumer machinery running. We, that is, want stories, and commercial interests ensure that we get them. The narratives the commercial interests spin, however, are always firmly within the control of the dominant ideology. We get the stories that the domi-

nant ideology deems safe enough for mass consumption. Even resistant texts that work against the dominant ideology still uphold that ideology by virtue of their participation in the distribution model itself.

While the witness ontology adequately represents the viewer of TV in the novels by DeLillo, we see a shift in Wallace's work, for he begins to predict the wide scale transition from broadcasting to narrowcasting. The viewer of "Entertainments" in *Infinite Jest* is able to create her own programming because she has unlimited choice in content as well as context. The viewer becomes more a director than simply a witness. Here, then, we need to attend to another of Ellis's concepts—choice fatigue. Choice fatigue, Ellis argues, is

the feeling that choices are simply too difficult; a nostalgia for pattern, habit and era when choices seemed few. Choice fatigue is a combination of impatience, a modern vice, and the sense of simply not wanting to be bothered [. . .]. There are moments when choice is an imposition rather than a freedom. Broadcast television answers to this feeling. (171)

In other words, broadcasting offers us the opportunity to turn on the TV and let the TV industry decide for us what we will watch, relieving us of the burden of making that decision. Milly Buonanno fleshes out Ellis's adumbration of choice fatigue, highlighting the dramatic shift from broadcasting to narrowcasting (23). She teases out the implications of ever-advancing digital technologies that allow the viewer more freedom from the strictures of network broadcast television. The shift from broadcasting to narrowcasting leads to tremendous diversification of products. Coupled with this diversification is the changing ways in which we access television. That is, Broadcast TV no longer holds sway; rather, prescription access, or what Buonanno calls "conditional access" to TV has become the norm (62). In addition, there are now more ways of

viewing television. Personal video recorders, video on demand, DVDs, and similar technologies allow us to view when we want to view rather than when programs air, and the internet is now a viable and growing point of access for much television programming. Beyond prescription access, Buonanno points out, we are also now seeing what she calls “inter-media cooperation,” especially through entanglement of the internet and television (63). All of these technological and industry advancements offer a tempting “emancipatory vision or ideology that is expressed unmistakably in irrefutable references to the revolutionary component of unlimited freedom of choice, apparently in easy reach” (Buonanno 63). She warns against this vision, arguing that technological determinism, a logical fallacy, is the temptation that lurks behind every technological advancement (Buonanno 64). While acknowledging that unlimited choice and access to televisual programming is inarguably a sea-change, Buonanno cautions against seeing this change as an unproblematic or deterministic evolutionary step in the industry.

In a section entitled “From forum to library,” an apt description of the shift in the way we approach TV, Buonanno discusses the liberation from the “tyranny of the schedule” of broadcast TV (68). She argues that viewers benefit from this shift in two ways: their choice of content is much wider, and they have much more individual control over what and how they watch television programming (68). That is, no longer enslaved to the television schedule, we are able, as Jonathan Gray puts it, “to create our own flows” (90). Buonanno argues that this development disembeds individual TV broadcasts by “disrupting the embedment of the contents into the context and the logic of the programming” and by erasing the “appointment-like nature” of TV programming (69). This march towards unlimited freedom of choice is precisely what Wallace describes, a few years ahead of time, no less. We will see how this shift in TV consumption habits

effects a change in viewer ontology (and its attendant epistemologies) from that of the witness in DeLillo to that of the director in Wallace.

All of the forgoing information seems to apply only to televisual media, but there is a growing trend in contemporary fiction as well as in criticism about contemporary fiction, to take note of the effects of TV on the subject and the way that subject inhabits print fiction. For example, Kathleen Fitzpatrick argues that in the age of TV, there are clusters of anxieties about obsolescence and these anxieties are tied to ever-advancing technologies, particularly televisual technologies. Using “television” as a metonym for electronic media (36), she argues that the “danger presented by the televisual machine is finally not ontological but epistemological, the confusing on a philosophical level of the categories of human and machine, categories upon whose distinction the novel has rested since the eighteenth century” (94). Speaking specifically about TV’s having “achieved such a level of animation that its inanimate mechanical state no longer goes without saying” (94), Fitzpatrick points to the troubled distinction that makes categorizing TV as simply object impossible to do. Further, she acknowledges that TV changes us. Referring specifically to cable TV, she argues that “[t]he subject is not freed from logos but trapped within it, in an endless chain of signification that transforms the individual into the ideal television watcher” (146). While Fitzpatrick’s examination of the novel in the age of television certainly addresses abstract theoretical constructs, she proceeds by way of close readings of several contemporary American texts; however, while she is right to point out the epistemological shifts taking place because of this transition in production and distribution methods, she misses the fact that the epistemological shifts give rise to (and are in turn themselves affected by) similarly motivated ontological shifts. I turn now to close examinations of Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* and *Underworld* and David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* in order to parse out the ways in

which the changing epistemological engagement with televisual narrative effects profound ontological change.

### **Don DeLillo**

In a 1993 interview with Adam Begley, DeLillo states, “Film allows us to examine ourselves in ways earlier societies could not—examine ourselves, imitate ourselves, extend ourselves, reshape our reality. It permeates our lives, this double vision, and also detaches us, turns some of us into actors doing walk-throughs” (105). While DeLillo specifies film here, the concepts he is teasing out reflect televisual media more generally. Film’s influence on DeLillo and the attention he gives to televisual media in his work constitute arguably the most significant strand of scholarship on DeLillo’s fiction. David Yetter argues that DeLillo uses varying techniques to place the reader in different positions in the story viz-a-viz the narrator. Yetter compares this strategy to “deep-focus cinematography” and highlights the fact that DeLillo underscores the interplay between the pixel and the broader picture (28). Similarly, John Johnston argues that DeLillo’s fiction exhibits a “post-cinematic perception,” a perspective informed by film and TV and which “can be described as a state in which the world seems to have lost all substance and anchoring or reference points, except in relation to other images or what are also conceived as images” (268). Further, post-cinematic perception changes subjectivity. Johnston claims that “subjectivity is accounted for as a ‘subtractive’ moment, the image or thing (they are ultimately the same) minus that which does not interest us as a function of our needs. In other words, one image is framed by another, and ‘subjectivity’ is simply the relationship between the two” (269). Johnston thereby locates subjectivity in a process, in an interaction between a psychic system and the media systems running alongside it. This focus on the image and the image’s framing is akin to the kinds of subjectivity we have encountered in both psychoanalysis and a



systems-theory based notion of subjectivity. That is, in psychoanalysis, the subject is formed through the process of recognizing Self and Other as distinguishable, speaking the “I,” and being observed by the Other. In systems theory, as we have seen, subjectivity is located in the process of an observer making a distinction and then re-entering the system as re-inscribed observer.

Indeed, DeLillo’s creation of unique subjectivities comprises an overlapping strand of scholarship surrounding his work. Curtis Yehnert calls DeLillo’s new kind of subjectivity “post-existential” (359). Yehnert argues that DeLillo portrays the individual as “inseparable from the environment, the relationship mutually constitutive and interdependent” and that these postexistential characters “are more collaborators with, rather than victims of, the socioeconomic system” (359). DeLillo, Yehnert argues, “shares with more traditional postmodernists the conviction that language gives form to both self and world; in doing so it reflects not so much a picture of reality as the force of our impulse to make sense of our experience by investing it with a coherence, symmetry, and closure that is imaginary, a fiction” (362). The postexistential characters, Yehnert insists, are quite distinct from DeLillo’s modernists and postmodernists:

These autonomous, existential individuals do not mark a return to modernism, for they do not win their individuality through agonistic struggle, nor have they found themselves or transcended themselves. Rather, they have accepted uncertainty and mediation, the responsibility for their own self-creation. They resist assimilation fully aware of their predicament: that they have no stable ground on which to stand but must stand anyway, that they have no guaranteed action to take but must act anyway. For DeLillo, this is the crux of human possibility. (364)

For Yehnert, then, DeLillo’s “postexistential” characters accept the responsibility for their own self creation precisely by accepting the role of the media in narrating their lives. What he sees as

“human possibility,” however, I see as a posthuman reality. The use of a relationship with the machine that spins our tales pushes us beyond human possibility in that it is predicated on human and *machine* co-creation.

Indeed, while Yehnert’s focus is firmly placed on DeLillo’s humanism, other scholars have urged a turn towards a more posthuman view of DeLillo’s work. For example, Randy Laist argues that DeLillo presents television sets, as well as other technologies, as more than mere objects in the story, but rather “as psychological phenomena which shape the possibilities for action, influence the nature of perception, and incorporate themselves into the fabric of memory and desire” (3). Laist insists that the “vision of the existential interpenetration of the human subject and the technological object is DeLillo’s most conspicuous and consistent theme” (13). This interphoric relationality goes beyond metaphor in that there is a “bi-directional carrying-between” (6). The human subject and the technological object are, in other words, mutually constitutive, and the categories “subject” and “object” are themselves shifting.

These new subjectivities/ontologies are augmented by new epistemologies in process alongside the shift in ontological positioning, particularly epistemologies structured around narrative. Narrative as a guiding theme in DeLillo’s work is a commonplace in scholarly literature. Often read as a Baudrillardian or Lyotardian, DeLillo exhibits a distrust in grand narratives, but that does not diminish the importance he places on narrative itself. Leonard Wilcox argues that despite the distrust in grand narratives, DeLillo exhibits a belief in the power of fictional narratives to critique (98). Stephanie Halldorson agrees, pointing to the fact that while DeLillo at times problematizes his characters’s hopes of totalizing narrative, he “does not imply that heroic narrative is impossible” (138). Narrative, though problematized by postmodern and poststructuralist theory, is not, according to Wilcox and Halldorson, rendered powerless.

*White Noise*

DeLillo's now canonical 1985 campus novel, *White Noise*, focuses on Professor of Hitler Studies Jack Gladney and his experiences with an "airborne toxic event," an obsessive death anxiety (which his wife shares), and his botched attempt to murder the man who, in exchange for sex, supplied his wife with a drug to combat the death anxiety. The airborne toxic event describes the result of a train accident that leaks toxic gases into the air surrounding Blacksmith, Gladney's hometown. The family evacuates and Jack is briefly exposed to Nyodene D. The threat of possible death from this exposure haunts the rest of Jack's story, eventually resulting in a pathological death anxiety. Jack ultimately confronts Mink, Babette's supplier (and the person with whom she had an affair). Infused throughout the novel is the (ever) presence of television, a constant hum or white noise vibrating within the text.

In the context of *White Noise*, television has been cast by scholars as the chief disseminator of both information and capitalist ideology (Osteen 166), an aid in interpreting life events and shaping both consciousness and the unconscious (Duvall 175), the mechanism that situates us within history and "forges the real" (Mexal 327-28), a producer and reflector of Jack and Babette's terror of death, an "atmospheric presence," the repository of contemporary myths, and "a way of perceiving yourself and the world" (Laist 72-74). All of these roles, however, can be lumped under the rubric of TV as supernarrator. That is, as the "culturally approved" supernarrator, TV has license to disseminate information and ideology, create and act as an archive for contemporary myths, help its viewers situate themselves within history, provide the framework for interpretation, and, even, as Mexal claims, forge the real.

It is easy to see TV's role as supernarrator in *White Noise*. Jack, when reacting to the evacuation due to the airborne toxic event says, "We're [residents of Blacksmith] not smack in

the path of history and its contaminations. If our complaints have a focal point, it would have to be the TV set, where the outer torment lurks, causing fears and secret desires” (85). The residents of Blacksmith, Jack implies, are not on the world stage of history, but they are brought to that stage precisely by TV. By extension, the same holds true for residents of any town, or indeed any place at all. Murrari J. Siskind, Jack’s colleague and a scholar of popular culture, provides much of the commentary on TV’s effects on our subjectivities, adhering to his colleague Alfonse’s notion that TV produces a phenomenon he calls “brain fade,” which is characterized by so much “bombardment of information” that we need an “occasional catastrophe” to provide breaks from the information overload (65). Indeed, Alfonse claims that “[f]or most people there are only two places in the world. Where they live and their TV set. If a thing happens on television, we have every right to find it fascinating, whatever it is” (64). Not only are we brought to the world stage by TV, then, but TV has also become the way we travel. Perhaps TV’s ubiquitous nature and far-reaching grasp is summed up best by Orest, the teenager training to sit in a cage with a poisonous snake, when he says, “Everything was on television last night” (255). A description of the quintessential witness, Orest’s remark points not only to the ubiquitous nature of TV, but also to the fact that we, as viewers, have access to “everything.”

Jack and Babette’s children, the novel suggests, are in a better position to assume the new television-inflected ontology than are the adult characters. Having grown up with TV, the children have never known a world in which they could not turn to the supernarrator to hear and see stories by and through which they could map their own lives. The children are not passive consumers, however. On the contrary, DeLillo paints the Gladney kids as critical consumers of television texts as well as of their own “real” lives. Indeed, it seems that their critical consumption of TV enables a more critical consumption of reality. Early in the novel, Jack remarks on Hei-

nrich observing his environment: “Heinrich came in, studied the scene carefully, my only son, then walked out the back door and disappeared” (7). A bit later in the novel, when the family sees Babette on TV, “Heinrich stood in a corner of the room, taking up his critical-observer position” (102). Heinrich is clearly used to witnessing, observing. The first instance of his observation highlights Heinrich’s televisual-inflected process of viewing: he is studying a “scene.” The second instance highlights what such a constant process of witness does to one’s ontological status: Heinrich has become a critical observer through the practice of watching. Similarly, Jack describes his daughter Bee as “a silent witness, calling the meaning of our lives into question” (94). Here, then, we have Luhmann’s observer and Ellis’s witness—both clearly located in the TV generation. Interestingly, Heinrich’s critical-observer position applies to his position with regard to TV as well as real life. So, too, does Bee’s witness position. The children, in other words, have learned to see TV and life as continuous, co-creating phenomena. Indeed, we see Bee’s position on the issue when she first arrives. While Jack waits on Bee to arrive at the airport, he listens to a man narrate the events of a particularly harrowing plane ride. Bee asks Jack where the media is, and after he replies that Iron City has no media, she says, “They went through all that for nothing?” (92). The media, for Bee, is an extension of real life, the arbiter of events, and that which validates and qualifies real life events as truly real.

Despite the fact that Jack is not as attuned to TV culture as his children, TV narrative greatly influences his sense of self and the way he situates that self in the world. Even the smallest moments of Jack’s life are potentially viewable through the eye of the TV: “I looked for a blanket to adjust, a toy to remove from a child’s warm grasp, feeling I’d wandered into a TV moment” (233). The phrase “wander[ing] into a TV moment” seems to suggest that Jack feels as though he is in a scripted narrative with a defined frame, and perhaps that he is being watched by

an audience that he cannot see. Further, this TV moment could be actual narrative programming, but it might just as readily be a commercial. That is, both the programming we actively watch and the commercials to which we are subjected offer us a steady supply of narratives. Indeed, the commercial narratives are more prevalent in Jack's conscious and unconscious. Early in the novel, Jack makes up a back story and a commercial context for a school crossing guard: "I picture her on a soup commercial taking off her oilskin hat as she entered the cheerful kitchen where her husband stood over a pot of smoking lobster bisque, a smallish man with six weeks to live" (23). The interconnection of the ever-presence of TV and the threat of death is no accident. Here, Jack is able to stave off his fear of death because, while the man in the imaginary commercial may be on the road to death, the commercial ends before his death, so he remains in a sort of stasis—fated to die by the narrative, and yet immortal because the narrative frame ends before he dies.

Indeed, throughout *White Noise*, Jack's narrative voice is saturated with the language of the market, a sort of unconscious internalization of the conditions of late capitalism. Brand names strung together in random places throughout the text provide a sort of commercial interruption of the narrative, but one that calls attention to itself and invites us to reflect on it. Jack initially shows no consciousness of these brief commercial breaks; they play like so much white noise in the background. Jack eventually does become conscious of the commercial interruptions, but only when they assume a narrative form. Towards the end of the novel, Jack's internalized white noise assumes a narrative form, interpellating Jack, albeit very briefly, into its narrative before returning him to his own. The text needs to be quoted here at some length:

Now and then I thought of the Zumwalt automatic hidden in the bedroom.

The time of the dangling insects arrived. White houses with caterpillars dangling from the eaves. White stones in driveways. You can walk at night down the middle of the street and hear women talking on the telephone. Warmer weather produces voices in the dark. They are talking about their adolescent sons. How big, how fast. The sons are almost frightening. The quantities they eat. The way they loom in doorways. These are the days that are full of wormy bugs. They are in the grass, stuck to the siding, hanging in the air, hanging from the trees and eaves, stuck to the window screens. The women talk long-distance to the grandparents of the growing boys. They share the Trimline phone, beamish old folks in hand-knit sweaters on fixed incomes.

What happens to them when the commercial ends?

I got a call myself one night. (259)

The commercial interruption in many ways mimics our experience watching television, but with the critical difference that DeLillo is here calling attention to the genre itself. If we were, for example, watching a TV show called *White Noise*, it might be interrupted by just such a commercial. Jack uses the interruption as a transition from talking about the handgun to talking to one of his ex-wives. In other words, he moves from one plot point to another by way of commercial break. Not only that, however; The Zumwalt lurks in the subtext for quite some time before becoming a player in the narrative. Here, just as Jack's narration is about to deal with it head on, he veers off to a commercial break (although we should perhaps think of it as an annotated commercial break, once again reinforcing the role of the second-order observer), relieving the tension and making us wait through that break before resuming the narrative, and when we do resume the narrative, it is not where we left off.

Frank Lentricchia claims that Jack's spoof of commercial narrative construction gives to Jack, and by extension, DeLillo, authorial agency and authority. He points to that fact that Jack appears to free himself by turning deliberate storyteller, by seizing his culture's most powerful medium of the image, the TV commercial, as stuff of literary narrative and the occasion of intervention. Jack is here postmodernism's own parodic Homer, no longer media subject, but media subjugator, telling us the tale of the electronic tribe. (92)

No longer simply a media subject, Jack gains a measure of narrative agency by engaging perhaps the most ubiquitous narrative form—the TV commercial. Further, Lentricchia claims, “it is in granting to Jack even that small amount of volition that we locate DeLillo's own authorial triumph” (92). Lentricchia argues that nowhere in America is it possible to sustain the distinction between the real and the fictional (74), and he locates DeLillo's triumph precisely in giving Jack authorial control, if only imaginary, of his programming, commercials included.

This momentary authorial agency notwithstanding, Jack's attempts to control the ways in which media impacts his subjectivity ultimately fail. Late in the novel, after Murray convinces Jack that there are only two kinds of people—those who die and those who kill—Jack confronts Willie Mink with the dual purpose of taking revenge for his wife's adultery and acquiring some Dylar for himself. He plans this confrontation to the minutest detail, but as Laist points out, the scene reads like a TV show version of a crime, incorporating formulaic plot points in his crime narrative as his strategy (104). Jack's plan reads like the plot of a procedural drama:

This was my plan. Enter unannounced, gain his confidence, wait for an unguarded moment, take out the Zumwalt, shoot him three times in the viscera for maximum slowness of agony, put the gun in his hand to suggest a lonely man's



suicide, write semi-coherent things on the mirror, leave Stover's car in Treadwell's garage. (292)

Three pages later, Jack repeats a slightly altered version of his plan to himself, checking his progress along his projected path. He has obviously memorized the formula for committing murder, but what he fails to see is that those plot elements are usually involved in *solving* the crime. He is following a formula for failure, but Jack's TV-inflected consciousness stands in his way of approaching the crime with any realistic strategies.

When Jack finds him, Mink is sitting in a chair "watching TV without the sound" (WN 292). So immersed in TV that he no longer even needs the audio element, Mink represents the individual fully dependent upon TV for a sense of self, though even that phrase is misleading, as Mink's sense of self has disappeared into the white noise of televisual media. Indeed, Jack states that "[a]s the TV picture jumped, wobbled, caught itself in snarls, Mink appeared to grow more vivid" (295). Becoming more like someone inside the TV than someone watching TV (something we will see in Wallace as well), Mink's presence takes on an otherly aura. At once unreal and hyper-saturated with the real itself, Mink neither distinguishes reality from TV nor engages Jack as anything other than one more source of stimulus. Jack sinks deeper into his plot, his own ontology shifting as he observes himself enacting the plot, playing the role in the script he is following. He says, "I was advancing in consciousness. I watched myself take each step. With each separate step, I became aware of processes, components, things relating to other things. Water fell to earth in drops. I saw things new" (291). It is only when he is shot that he returns to his "normal" state of consciousness. His bleeding body snaps him back into the materiality of the world, to the reality of an embodied affective human consciousness. It is precisely this embodied consciousness that makes Jack's story end differently than Helen's. Knowing that she

would forever be disembodied, Helen chose not to be at all. Jack's embodiment pulls him back from a total immersion into the consciousness he has fabricated around TV narratives.

### *Underworld*

*Underworld*, published in 1997 and running over 800 pages, attempts to explore the last half of the twentieth century in America, reworking (and subverting) American myths, defamiliarizing time and narrative chronology, and interweaving historical events with fictive ones. The narrative runs roughly backwards, though the prologue occurs in 1951. DeLillo pulls the various narrative threads together, linking baseball to nuclear weapons to waste management to serial murder to postmodern subjectivity (and I could go on). While several characters might pass the test for protagonist, Nick Shay is the central character of the novel. He struggles against growing old and attempts to heal from the trauma of accidentally killing his father-figure when he was a teenager. Perhaps most importantly, we see this recovery process take place backwards. That is, as readers, we do not know that Nick killed George for several hundred pages, a textual strategy that defamiliarizes the relationship the reader has with the narrative. The information the narrative withholds, that is, is crucial to a fully enriched reading of the pages that come before the revelation of this major plot point, demanding a re-reading. This defamiliarization points, once again, to the recursive, multiply connected, and constantly changing narrative systems in and around which we place ourselves.

Critics point out *Underworld's* thorough history-building approach to narrating the second half of the twentieth century, underscoring the novel's position as DeLillo's master work. Patrick O'Donnell argues that "*Underworld* is, perhaps, the most capacious fictionalization of human subjectivity in the postmodern era available to us—a postmodernism that, in Frederic Jameson's hands, is founded on a modernity where the entangled relationships among 'self,' 'ob-

ject,' and 'world' have undergone a fundamental change" (109). He also argues that "*Underworld* is largely about this transformation in the relation between subjects and objects" (109). DeLillo undertakes this task, O'Donnell argues, in order to "elicit what constitutes identity for us, now" (109). As we have seen with *White Noise*, DeLillo imagines a new kind of subjectivity. As O'Donnell points out, this transformation in subjectivity has much to do with the changing nature of subject object relations. Part of this transition, I contend, is the transformation of TV into something more subject-like. Tv's role as supernarrator gives it a status that transcends mere object-ness.

While there are several angles through which I could pursue DeLillo's representation of televisual media and its relationality to subjectivity in *Underworld*, I want to focus on only two narrative threads, the sections of the novel devoted to the Texas Highway Killer, and the sections covering the video performance of the Zapruder home movie of Kennedy's assassination. Both of these examples specifically focus on mediated (and thus also mass-consumed) violent disaster. Examining mediated disaster is certainly not new for DeLillo. In the Begley interview, DeLillo says, "In my work, film and television are often linked with disaster. Because this is one of the energies that charges the culture. TV has a sort of panting lust for bad news and calamity as long as it's visual. We've reached the point where things exist so they can be filmed and played and replayed" (105). Just as Bee makes clear in *White Noise* that the media is the arbiter of events and the guarantor of the real, so too, here, DeLillo suggests that reality is only constituted when it is played, replayed, mass-distributed, and mass-consumed.

The Texas Highway Killer sections, though brief and comprising a very small percentage of the text of *Underworld*, haunt the novel. Richard Henry Gilkey, the Texas Highway Killer, is responsible for ten shooting deaths, each occurring on the highway while both Gilkey and Gil-

key's victim are driving. We learn that Gilkey has perfected his strategy, teaching himself how to shoot with his left hand with perfect steadiness and aim across his body (266). As readers, we are first introduced to the Texas Highway Killer through the eyes of Matt Shay, Nick's younger brother, but we do not yet know it is Matt because the narrative is told in second person. The reader, then, is literally inscribed into the text as viewer of the video footage of one of the murders committed by the Texas Highway Killer. The reader's interpellation into the story as observer is a reminder that we are all to be implicated in the witness ontology. Nick is watching the endlessly televised home video of one of the murders, captured on video by a little girl who was playing with her parents' video camera in the car. Nick's ruminations on the Texas Highway Killer (and his obsessive need to both watch the footage and make his wife watch it) lead him to posit that this particular crime seems to be "designed for random taping and immediate playing" (159). Nick continues:

You sit there and wonder if this kind of crime became more possible when the means of taping an event and playing it immediately, without a neutral interval, a balancing space and time, became widely available. Taping-and-playing compresses the event. It dangles a need to do it again. You sit there thinking that the serial murder has found its medium, or vice versa—an act of shadow technology, of compressed time and repeated images, stark and glary and unremarkable. (*UW* 159)

The murder becomes famous not in and for itself, but rather because it was caught on tape by a child whom the media calls the Video Kid. Mexal argues that the tape "has a 'searing realness' precisely because it is not real: it is, impossibly, 'truer-to-life' than actual *life*. Not to put too fine a point on it, but the reproduction of the terror act—the semblance—is 'more real,' more

authentic, than the original act” (323). The murder becomes famous, in large part, because of the layers of observation it repeatedly offers. That is, the murder is real to the viewer simply because it is available for viewing, something to be witnessed. The Video Kid becomes reified as the first observer, and, indeed, the re-inscribed observer, as she takes on an aura in the video as well, the aura of the deliverer of the possibility of observation. As we become viewers through the eyes of Matt Shay, we become, ourselves, culpable of the desire to observe and to share that experience with others, just as Matt insists his wife watch it with him. The event itself—the murder of a man and the fact that “you,” the viewer, could watch and rewatch this man die on a constant loop—combine to create in the viewer the perfect harmony of compression, repetition, form, and content. Viewers may not be actual murderers, but they are complicit in its endless mediated repetition.

Jeremy Green argues that a “media-poisoned” individual such as Richard Gilkey “confuses fantasy for reality, giving a privative, anonymous identity a starring role in the public theater of news, opinion and sensation” (“Disaster Footage” 575-76). Green insists that this confusion of fantasy and reality results from “[t]he channel between isolated private experience and collective being is one laid down in fantasy” (575). Fantasy operates primarily through narrative, as we have seen in chapters one and two. Stephen J. Mexal argues that spectacularized terror—necessarily enabled by televisual media—reconfigures our self in relation to the Real and indeed reconfigures the Real itself. Remembering Fiske’s point that news is always already story, we can see how the information itself—the content of the news—would be meaningless without its emplotment, its unique situation in time and space, its situatedness in narrative. The narrative frame gives rise to a contextualized revision of our concepts of both self and world.

We must wait over one hundred pages before we see any more sign of the Texas Highway Killer, and when we do, it is through the eyes of Gilkey himself. Here, we see the serial murder contextualized within several layers of story. DeLillo develops Richard's character by first showing the stereotypical serial killer traits, made popular by TV and film. Richard, aloof and living with his parents at the age of forty-one, has no friends, though not for lack of trying. He is extremely socially awkward and obsessed with details. The narrator (whose voice is saturated with Richard's own) provides this exposition and then describes Richard's use of media interaction to subjectivize. Richard calls a local news station, with voice-disguising measures in place, and demands to talk to the anchor woman, Sue Ann. This experience profoundly affects him, the narrator describing it as "the waking of the knowledge that he was real" (270). Indeed, Sue Ann becomes Richard's only connection with another human being: "[s]he made him feel real, talking on the phone. She gave him the feeling he was taking shape as himself, coming into the shape he's always been intended to take, the thing of who he really was. It was like filling out" (269). In order to feel filled out, complete, Richard needs to place himself in his own story, mass-delivered through TV broadcasts, and he needs to do this by engaging with a culturally trusted narrator, a news anchor. He also needs, however, to be a part of the telling. Green points out that "[i]n his phone calls to Sue Ann Corcoran, the Texas Highway Killer merely literalized what is implicit in the convention of the medium [familial identification with news anchors]. But, at the same time, these displacements and identifications transform the nature of privacy itself" (576). Indeed, Green insists that privacy is "always implicitly open to the eye of the camera. The spectacular relation to lived reality no longer reaches its limit at the surface of the body" (585). This collapse of privacy into technological mediation creates, according to Green, "DeLillo's dystopian vision," which "imagines an increasingly mystified everyday reality, one rendered

cryptic by the new visual technologies” (585). Part of this dystopian vision undoubtedly includes the rendering of a society totally dependent upon televisually mediated narrative in order to individuate.

Richard’s need for narrative does not stop at the televisual, however. He needs to live in the stories of his victims by consuming the transmedial landscape of his murders. He has watched the tape several times, but is suspicious of it “because it had a vista different from his experience” and because “every time he watched the tape he thought he was going to turn up in his own living room, detached from who he was, peering squint-eyed over the wheel of his compact car” (270). The perspective the video camera provides, different from Richard’s own, shows him an angle of the murder to which he previously had no access. Rather than letting this new perspective fill in the narrative, though, he instead feels that it is somehow less authentic than his own experience. This sense of unreality is different for Richard than for Matt or us as viewers since, for Richard, the video offers a competing perspective, whereas for Matt (as the stand-in for the average TV viewer), the video makes the event itself real. Perhaps because of the competing perspective offered by the video, Richard also follows his story, and by extension the story of his victims, in the newspaper: “He came alive in them. He lived in their histories, in the photographs in the newspaper, he survived in the memories of the family, lived with the victims, lived on, merged, twinned, quadrupled, continued into double figures” (271). This need to narrativize is not unique to Richard. The viewers from Nick Shay’s account are culpable as well. As Mexal points out, this device “implicates even the reader. We consumers, we victims of the spectacle: we are terrorists, all” (322). Indeed, “this mere semblance not only supplants, but seemingly improves upon, reality. It ‘shapes’ reality, gives it a ‘destiny.’ The viewer, accordingly, is unable to stop watching. (Hence the narrator’s order to ‘keep on looking’ [157].) The viewer looks,

then, not only because it is terror, but because it is tape” (322). Gilkey and the viewer are both guilt—Gilkey of the murder, and the viewer of sanctioning that murder by allowing it to be turned into spectacle. The ultimate witness, the viewer of the Texas Highway Killer murder, represents everything DeLillo finds problematic about the witness ontology.

Like the Texas Highway Killer sections, the sections devoted to the showing of the Zapruder film highlight the interrelationships among the event, the event’s mediation, the perspective of the camera, and the viewer’s own perspective, which, enriched by all of the above elements, becomes a hyperreal experience. Klara Sax, one of Nick Shay’s old lovers and one of the characters through whose eyes the narrative is filtered, attends a party hosted by a Video Artist who provides an aestheticized viewing of a bootlegged copy of the Zapruder film, repeated multiply and in fragmented form on dozens of TVs. Klara describes the event’s environment in terms of its relationship to TV—both the object and the medium:

TV sets were arranged in stacks everywhere in the flat and other sets were parked individually on TV tables with copies of TV Guide and there were sets with rabbit ears and a few old mahogany consoles and every size screen from the smallest imported eyeball to the great proscenium face of the household god. (488)

The multiplicity and arrangement of TV sets into a theater saturated with not just the televisual, but also TV itself, turns a twenty second home video into an hours-long inundation of mediated history. Klara, an artist herself, foresees the possible trauma of such an event, which she well remembers, though this viewing is several years after the assassination, so she undertakes a strategy of detachment (488). The first Zapruder film section, then, is itself mostly detached. We see through Klara’s eyes what happens at the party, but her detachment pulls the event out of history and makes it an object of aesthetic media. In other words, she is able to present her experience



of the text, narratively, without the cloud of emotional engagement. We, as readers, get description here, but very little introspection. Klara's strategy of detachment ultimately fails, however, as not ten pages later, the event resurfaces in Klara's narrative, and here we get the introspection. Detaching fully is not possible because the media event is a "working through" of the historical event. She says, "the movie in fact was powerfully open, it was glary and artless and completely steeped in being what it was, in being film. It carried a kind of inner life, something unconnected to the things we call phenomena" (495). The film's *thingness*, to Klara, its saturation in its own filmic presence, detaches experience and historical event from history, but it also catalyzes the process of "working through," processing, mapping out the narrative and our inability to separate that particular narrative from the profoundly mediated experience of watching it. Further, Klara finds in the film an analogue to human subjectivity:

this was a death that seemed to rise from the steamy debris of the deep mind, it came from some night of the mind, there was some trick of film emulsion that showed the ghost of consciousness. Or so she thought to wonder. She thought to wonder if this home movie was some crude *living likeness of the mind's own technology*, the sort of death plot that runs in the mind, because it seemed so familiar, the footage did—it seemed a thing we might see, not see but know, a *model* of the nights when we are intimate with our own dying. (496, emphasis added)

Likening the Zapruder film to "the mind's own technology," Klara points to the mind's need to run plots and scenarios, indeed, small stories. The mind's technology is comprised of the mechanism by which those stories are transcribed—and transformed—into selves.

Klara's discomfort with the witness ontology is in contrast to the representations of the witness we see in *White Noise*; Heinrich and Bee exhibit comfort with the witness ontology, and

they clearly see potential for critical engagement with their worlds because of it. Klara, in contrast, seems to feel helpless in the face of the witness ontology. She says, “here was an event that took place at the beginning of the sixties, seen belatedly, that now marked the conceptual end, carrying all the delirium that floated through that age, and people stood around and talked” (496). Witnessing history through the lens of a narrative, technologically mediated, this passage suggests, leads to a numbness to history and to the real. Similarly, Matt’s compulsively repeated witnessing of the video depicting the Texas Highway Killer’s murder suggests a deeply problematic connection between witnessing the world televisually (and with varying degrees of fictionality) and increasing viewer complicity in horrific events. With Wallace, we will see how the witness gives way to the director ontology and how this shift also presents potential danger.

### **David Foster Wallace**

We have seen how the witness ontology becomes a dominant mode of subjectivity in the work of DeLillo, and how television makes this subjectivity possible. This model is not adequate to describe the work Wallace is doing in *Infinite Jest*, however, because Wallace focuses his engagement with TV on the ever-advancing technologies behind television entertainment and broadcasting. In other words, DeLillo’s work is in many ways located firmly in the age of availability. Wallace’s work, on the other hand, anticipates the age of plenty and uncertainty. For Wallace, then, we need to look beyond the witness ontology and explore Ellis’s concept of choice fatigue and the role it plays in changing the ways in which we subjectivize through televisual narrative. Pulling these two ideas together, I argue, gives us a Luhmannesque Observer figure. That is, by passing through the witness ontology and then entering the realm of unlimited choice, wherein we can create our own content as well as our own flow, we re-inscribe ourselves into the televisual narrative experience. To paraphrase a current commercial, we stop watching

TV and start directing it. While at first pass, unlimited choice in televisual entertainment sounds like a positive development, we will see how Wallace, along with media theorists such as John Ellis and Milly Buonanno, point toward the dangers inherent to this process.

Arguing that Wallace is a “sentimental posthumanist,” Paul Giles insists that “Wallace’s originality might be said to reside in the way he reconvenes traditional forms of American cultural idealism in a radically alien technological environment” (332). Giles suggests that “[t]he force field of Wallace’s fiction turns stylistically on the interface between the human and the machine, between spirit and technology” (335). Likening the human/machine binary to the spirit/technology binary, Giles points to an important piece of Wallace’s argument—the categories themselves have begun to blur. The human and machine, merging more and more intimately, result in something that transcends both categories. Wallace’s focus on the human does not, Giles insists, equal a “relapse into a sclerotic humanism,” but rather, it presents the “search for fragments of authentic personality amidst the razzmatazz of scientific jargon and hip-hop slang, so that a novel such as *Infinite Jest* might be said to involve a putative humanization of the digital sensibility” (336). By this logic, Wallace offers a corrective to both humanist and posthuman philosophies, implicitly arguing that a key component is the *interface* between the human and the machine. For Wallace, I argue, this sentimental posthuman characteristic is never more apparent than in his critical engagements with the effects of TV on human consciousness.

Wallace’s nonfiction reveals a profound ambivalence towards TV. In “*E. Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction*,” Wallace argues that TV has his “generation by the throat” (171), and yet he also insists that “[i]f we want to know what American normality is—what Americans want to regard as normal—we can trust television. For television’s whole *raison* is reflecting what people want to see. It’s a mirror” (152). Wallace’s position here reflects that while we

watch TV, we are in a very real sense watching ourselves. We passively (and sometimes actively) consume story after story that in some way represents the way we live, the way we want to live, and/or the way we fear we are living. The tension and ambivalence Wallace displays here recurs throughout *Infinite Jest*. Wallace both hates and loves TV. He sees and acknowledges its power as a medium to capture our undivided attention, and even to some extent acknowledges that art and TV can coexist, but he also sees (and is terrified of) TV's power to enslave. Wallace points out that television is about desire, and "[f]ictionally speaking, desire is the sugar in human food" (152). His point is that, while TV is not itself necessarily a *bad* thing, too much of it *can* be a bad thing, and the nature of TV is to make it easy to become addicted to the sugary easiness of the Broadcast model. The more we feed the desire, the more we want to feed.

In an extended interview with David Lipsky, Wallace claims to be addicted to television, which is why he chooses not to have one (155). He further confides that his parents' fears about TV negatively affecting his and his sister's performance at school were entirely unfounded; watching fairly large doses of TV was something that he and his sister could do and still be good students as well as good athletes. On the other hand, however, it is precisely because TV is so good at doing what TV does that it becomes so addictive. His addiction to TV is, like other addictions, "a continuum, involving a fundamental orientation. Lookin' for *easy* pleasurable stuff outside me to make things all right. And I'm not saying there's anything wrong with it. But I'm saying it's a continuum, and that we *slide*" (qtd in Lipsky 155-56, emphasis in original). He asserts that in *Infinite Jest* he explores the connection between addiction to entertainment and drug addiction, insisting that there is "a significant similarity between [his] relationship to television, and some of these people in the halfway house's relation to, say, heroin" (qtd in Lipsky 156). Wallace is not calling TV a drug, and he is not condemning TV (or heroin, for that matter). Ra-

ther, he sees the particular kind of relationship we develop with both drugs and TV as something that fundamentally alters us ontologically. Sometimes this alteration turns ugly, and sometimes it does not. In the case of TV, as, arguably, with drugs, that result can be fruitful and fun, or it can be debilitating. Here it is useful to remember the epigraph to this chapter. Wallace asserts that our dependencies themselves have not changed; we are still, that is, addicted to fantasies. However, now we have the technology to make those fantasies realer than real life, and that is both tantalizing and highly dangerous in Wallace's mind.

Part of the problem, for Wallace, is that TV also affords access only one way, but that this lack of reciprocity does not constitute voyeurism: "Television does not afford true espial because television is performance, spectacle, which by definition requires watchers. We're not voyeurs here at all. We're just viewers. We are the Audience, megametrically many though most often we watch alone. *E. unibus pluram*" (153). Unified in our membership in the Audience, we join, somewhat paradoxically, a collective of sorts, by engaging in a one-to-one relationship with our TV. The Audience, as Wallace casts it here, is not compulsively driven to watch, and the watching it does is not without permission. Passive in its willingness to watch whatever is viewable, the Audience watches people who know they are being watched and are performing specifically for that purpose. This mutual passivity, to Wallace, while not wholly erasing the possibility of critical engagement, does limit its potential, and that is Wallace's primary problem with TV.

Wallace is very clear about his belief that TV affects our consciousnesses in some deleterious ways. Viewers develop what he calls a "spectational self-conscious" attitude with regard to watching TV ("E. Unibus" 160). Essentially, in other words, viewers become second order observers: "Because the practice of watching is expansive. Exponential. We spend enough time

watching, pretty soon we start watching ourself [*sic*] watching. We start to ‘feel’ ourselves feeling, yearn to experience ‘experiences.’ And that American subspecies into writing starts writing more and more about. . . ” (160). Wallace points here to the characteristic postmodern convention of continuously increasing the layers of awareness, going more and more “meta,” so to speak. Wallace does not articulate this process as one of second-order observation, but that is precisely what happens when we watch ourselves watching. Wallace could easily be talking about the fiction of Barth and Powers here, but he is also describing himself. The kind of observation he describes here is a passive one, characterized by a lack of critical engagement, or indeed, of awareness. The second-order observer in such a scenario may very well be re-inscribed into the text, but without that crucial difference of awareness. For Wallace, observation that remains first order, remains passive, becomes addictive and ultimately lethal. Seen in this light, we can view *Infinite Jest* as a one thousand-page warning about what might happen if we continue down a path of enslavement to televisual fantasies. In part, he offers print fiction that reflects on televisual culture as one corrective to the dependence on televisual fantasies. That is, critically reflecting on television through engagement in print fiction (and nonfiction, for that matter) allows viewers to enjoy TV without becoming enslaved to it. Wallace’s fiction allows the reader the texture of TV without the total immersion. He claims that, contrary to what TV offers, a “relief from what it feels like to live,” serious fiction is and should be “*about* what it feels like to live” (Lipsky 39, emphasis added). Essentially, Wallace wants his readers to return to televisual texts with more critical engagement after reading his TV-inflected prose. Wallace wants his readers to “continue to do that magical stuff” even as the “cognitive texture” of our lives changes, particularly with regard to the different media we use to represent our lives (Lipsky 39).

Similar to what we find in DeLillo, one of the aspects of TV that Wallace finds most important to acknowledge and negotiate is the commercialized presence surrounding televisual texts. He argues that commercials, part of the flow of broadcast TV, serve as commentary to and even advancement of the medium itself. That is, commercials attempt to teach us how to relate to both TV and to the products and services they are offering for consumption. He states,

the deep message of television w/r/t these ads looks to be that Joe Briefcase's ontological status as just one in a reactive watching mass is in a deep way false, and that true actualization of self would ultimately consist in Joe's becoming one of the images that are the objects of this great herdlike watching. That is, TV's real pitch in these commercials is that it's better to be inside the TV than to be outside, watching. (176)

Wallace's point here actually sheds some light on Jack Gladney's repeated attempts to narrativize his own life, particularly through commercials. Jack wants to be inside the TV (one reason why he is so shaken when he sees Babette on TV) because TV is where, in late postmodernity, the Real is located. Similarly, the Texas Highway Killer does not feel "real" until he "appears" on TV, talking to the anchorwoman. Wallace's fiction takes up his own challenge to offer print fiction that deals with TV as a way to counter TV's more harmful effects. *Infinite Jest* offers a terrifying vision of entertainment (particularly televisual entertainment) that offers not hope, exactly, but *something hopeful* with regard to the ways in which we can—and should, Wallace implicitly claims—critically engage the texts we consume, both print and televisual.

### *Infinite Jest*

*Infinite Jest*, Wallace's second novel, published in 1996, runs over one thousand pages and includes nearly one hundred pages of footnotes. Some of these footnotes are strictly infor-

mational (and some information is correct, while some is purely fictional), some are informal clarifications or even mis-directions, and some include crucial exposition to the plot. Greg Carlisle argues that *Infinite Jest*'s structure "mirror[s] our frenetic culture" (17). He further contends that while Wallace is certainly not the first author to veer from linear structure, "this technique mirrors the anxiety we feel in a culture that gives us a 'confusion of choices' (*Jest* 752) or when we face an impossible choice" (17). For our purposes here, we need only parse out the three main narrative threads. One thread follows the search for the lethal Entertainment cartridge, created by James Incandenza and also titled *Infinite Jest*. Incandenza committed suicide and may or may not have destroyed the master copies of the lethal Entertainment. Several political factions are in pursuit of the master copies, including the Canadian terrorist group, *Les Assassins des Fauteuils Rollents* (AFR, or, in the U.S. the "Wheelchair Assassins"), led by Remy Marathe. Their intention is to mass produce the lethal Entertainment and initiate a long-term terror campaign, systematically infecting citizens of the interdependent Canada and U.S. Another narrative thread follows Incandenza's son, Hal, a junior tennis player at Enfield Tennis Academy (ETA), a boarding school run by his mother (and formerly his father). The novel begins with the end of Hal's story. That is, the opening is chronologically the last thing to take place. In many ways, reading *Infinite Jest* is a quest to find out how Hal gets to where he is at the beginning of the story (the reader hopes for this information in vain, however). This thread follows Hal, a fairly good tennis player and a brilliant student with a photographic memory, into his addiction to marijuana. A third narrative follows Don Gately, a resident and volunteer at Ennet House, a halfway house not far from ETA. This thread follows Gately as he fights his own narcotics addiction and attempts to help the other residents of Ennet House fight their respective addictions. The three threads eventually interconnect, though in strange ways. For



example, Don Gately dreams of a future event (that is outside of the time included in the novel) in which he and Hal dig up James Incandenza's body because they believe they will find the lethal Entertainment cartridge buried with him. Similarly, in the opening epilogue, so to speak, Hal says, "I think ok of John N. R. Wayne, who would've won this year's WhataBurger, standing watch in a mask as Donald Gately and I dig up my father's head" (*IJ* 16-17). These two semi-conscious references to an event not contained in the timeline of the novel are particularly strange because Don Gately and Hal Incandenza do not meet in the story itself. The backdrop to all of these plot points is a complicated geopolitical/commercial situation. Under President Johnny Gentle, a former crooner, the U.S. jettisons a toxic waste dump out of its borders by changing the map and ceding that land to Canada. Additionally, the U.S. and Canada merge and become O.N.A.N., the acronym itself parodying the narcissistic and nigh on masturbatory underpinnings of this new political structure.

Wallace asserts in an interview with Larry McCaffrey that his fiction does in some ways mimic watching TV, but with an important difference. He wants his reader always to be aware of the mediated nature of the experience (137-38). That is, unlike TV, which attempts to immerse the viewer in the storyworld completely and uncritically, his fiction makes unmediated immersion impossible. Indeed, the structure of *Infinite Jest* attests to this strategy, as it in some ways mimics the constant flipping of channels. The main text, constantly interrupted by footnotes that require flipping back and forth between pages, might be saturated with the texture of TV, but it is difficult to get lost in the storyworld for very long without an interruption that points to the story's own mediation. If we look at the first sixteen pages as a combination of both prologue and epilogue, then the rhetoric behind this move becomes clear. The last words before entering the first installment from the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment are Hal's inner nar-

ration, describing a hospital orderly (a fictitious orderly in an as-if sort of small story), approaching Hal to ask “So yo then man what’s *your* story?” This statement signals the end of the prolepsis and the beginning of the narrative chronology. The opening structure of the novel echoes the “cold open of a TV show that establishes a scenario, goes to commercial break, and then comes back to the main chronology of the narrative to explain how the intrepid heroes got into such a fix. And here, too, there is a commercial break. The next words of the text are “YEAR OF THE DEPEND ADULT UNDERGARMENT,” establishing, albeit through the reader’s initial confusion, the geopolitical situation, which is one of profound dependence on commercialized life. This structure not only mimics the texture of TV, but it also highlights the recursive and complex nature of this narrative. The novel becomes a lengthy exercise in finding out how Hal ended up in this strange situation; but this information never arrives. When reaching the end of the novel, then, the reader flips back to the beginning to see what was missed. This structure demands re-reading, but a rereading that understands that it is not a rereading so much as a looping reading.

According to N. Katherine Hayles, *Infinite Jest*’s looping structure highlights the recursive nature of the co-production of self and market, civilization and wilderness. Hayles insists that we must attend to the recursive processes that create the conditions of possibility for such co-productions or risk spiraling into ultimately “destructive behaviors” (“Illusion” 678). The recursive nature of the novel, as Hayles would have it, speaks to the multiple ways in which we are constituted and reconstituted as subjects within specific socio-historical contexts. Our environment creates and re-creates even as we create and re-create our environment. The novel is not just a loop, however. David Hering, for example, highlights the triangle motif in the novel, arguing that the form and content are thereby made fractals (or self-similar) of one another (90-91). I would argue that, in addition, it might be helpful to think of the Deleuzian rhizome here.

Each narrative thread seems to connect to the other narrative threads, but it does so at random and often multiple intersecting points. The rhizome metaphor gives us the texture of chaos, something that Wallace is very vocal about trying to achieve with the novel, and the loop and triangle metaphors give us a way into that chaos.<sup>20</sup> These multiple ways of configuring the structure of the novel, all rooted in mathematical principles, point to the critical multiplicity possible when looking at Wallace's fiction. The structure of the novel is inarguably complex, but Wallace provides multiple ways into it, structurally as well as thematically.

It is not just the structure of the novel that reflects TV-inflected consciousness, but also the content. More precisely, the structure and the content are fractals of one another. A key to understanding this reciprocal, recursive, and infinite relationship is the interrogation of the relationship viewers form with TV and how that relationship changes with the developments in changes in production and distribution, particularly insofar as the relationship hinges on viewer choice. This interrogation starts with a close look at the demise of Broadcast TV in the novel.

The failure of Broadcast TV in *Infinite Jest* rests in large part on the failure (and ironic simultaneous success) of the TV-ad industry. In a recapitulation of one of Hal's seventh grade essays, we learn that the nail in the coffin of Broadcast TV the advertising industry's increasing success at creating commercials so disturbing and frightening that viewers immediately flipped away from the channel to escape the traumatic experience. These same viewers, however, also bought the products in question in record numbers. This simultaneous success and failure (suc-

---

<sup>20</sup> Wallace's attraction to the concept of infinity led him to pen a book on it (*Everything and More*) for the *Great Discoveries* series, which aims to elucidate scientific discoveries for intelligent, but not argot-laden, prose for the non-scientist. Wallace's undergraduate degree from Amherst was in modal logic, a sub-discipline of philosophy, but this fact notwithstanding, it is mostly high-level abstract math. This attraction to and adeptness with abstract math in general, and infinity in particular, seeps into *Infinite Jest* as well, lending it the encyclopedic feel described by LeClair and Bowne-Anderson.

cess because consumers bought the advertised products and failure because viewers immediately switched the channel), Hal insists, effectively ended the Broadcast TV industry, which was already “in serious trouble” (411). Hal argues that

between the exponential proliferation of cable channels, the rise of the total-viewer-control-hand-held remotes known historically as zappers, and VCR-recording advances that used subtle volume- and hysterical-pitch-sensors to edit most commercials out of any program taped[ . . .]. [T]he Networks were having problems drawing the kinds of audiences they needed to justify the ad-rates their huge overhead’s slaving maw demanded. (411)

Technology, in other words, enhanced market pressures to the point that the entire system began to fail. InterLace took over the production and distribution industries, arguing that it did not matter whether people had one, a handful, or hundreds of TV channels, the problem was that they had limited choice: “Because here you were—assuming of course you were even cable-ready or dish-equipped and able to afford monthly fees that applied no matter what you ‘chose’ each month—here you were, sitting here accepting only what was pumped by distant A.C.D.C. fiat into your entertainment ken” (416). InterLace offered a solution by asking a question: “what if the viewer could become her/his *own* programming director; what if s/he could *define* the very entertainment-happiness it was her/his right to pursue?” (416). This solution proved palatable to the public, and Broadcast networks fizzled out. Along with Broadcast TV, TV advertisements disappeared, for “there were—could be—no ads of any kind in the InterLace pulses or ROM cartridges” (417). Highlighting the inextricable connection between TV programming and the market that pays for it, Wallace imagines a near future in which the market research and advertising companies have become so good at what they do that the system must reinvent itself.

Wallace does more than abstractly theorize Broadcast TV. He also offers extended discussions of specific TV texts. In another of Hal's seventh grade essays, he explores the heroes in *Hawaii Five-O* and *Hill Street Blues*, arguing that fictional character Steve McGarret, Chief of Police in *Hawaii Five-O*, is a modern hero in that he is a man of action. Captain Frank Furillo, from *Hill Street Blues*, on the other hand, is a postmodern hero because he is a man of reaction. Hal further argues that the post-postmodern hero will be a man of non-action:

Furillo's is a whole different kind of loneliness. The 'post'-modern hero was a heroic *part of* the herd, responsible for all of what he is part of, responsible to everyone [. . .] The jut-jawed hero of action ('Hawaii Five-O') becomes the wild-eyed hero of reaction ('Hill Street Blues,' a decade later) [. . .] We await, I predict, the hero of *non*-action, the catatonic hero, the one beyond calm, divorced from all stimulus, carried here and there across sets by burly extras whose blood sings with retrograde amines." (142, emphasis in original)

Hal here essentially describes himself as we meet him first, at the novel's beginning (and the story's end). Though he insists in the second paragraph of the novel, "I am in here," he cannot communicate to anyone (3). As the novel opens, a college admissions board interviews Hal, and since Hal cannot communicate, Hal's Uncle and second-in-command at ETA, Charles Tavis sits in to "speak for" Hal. After trying—and failing—to communicate with the admissions board, Hal says, "I'd tell you all you want to know and more, if the sounds I made could be what you hear" (9). His performance is so terrifying to the admissions board that someone calls an ambulance, and they sedate Hal. At this point, he says, "[m]y head is cradled in a knelt director's lap, which is soft, my face being swabbed with some dusty brown institutional paper towels" (13). Hal's Uncle Charles assures the college committee that Hal is fine, capable of performing aca-

demically and on the tennis court, even if he is inexplicably rendered unable to communicate face to face (or simply “interfacing,” as Hal would call it). Uncle Charles says to the committee, “Look at him, calm as can be, lying there” (13). Unable to offer any other positive and believable support for his argument, Charles points to Hal’s calm, his non-action. Regardless of what has landed Hal in this situation (the text supports several possibilities), Hal is now the perfect hero of non-action that he describes in seventh grade. Further, he seems content with his lot, true to the subjectivity he seems now to have. He says, “I simply lie there, listening, smelling the paper towel, watching as espadrille pivot” (15). At this point, Hal, “divorced from all stimulus,” seems to have a flat affect, no particular feeling one way or another about the situation. He transforms into this hero of non-action in part because he has predicted it, a self-fulfilling prophecy made possible by the consumption of televisual entertainment. Consuming TV shows, and then later his father’s entire corpus, possibly including *Infinite Jest* (one theory as to why he is in this state), makes Hal into the very hero he felt televisual entertainment should turn to. He has inscribed himself into the story-scape of TV.

The story that Agent Steeply tells to Double Agent Marathe of his father’s addiction to the TV show *M\*A\*S\*H*, similar to Hal’s seventh grade essay, uses a cultural anchor—a particular TV show (and in this case an iconic one)—to explore the evolution of the human relationship with TV narrative. Like most of the conversations between Marathe and Steeply, the story of Steeply’s father’s “dark shift in his attachment” to *M\*A\*S\*H* is a bit over the top. Steeply says, “My own father, sometime around midlife. We watched him get consumed with a sort of entertainment. It wasn’t pretty. I was never sure how it started or what it was about” (639). After a pause, Steeply says, “But nothing like this sort of Entertainment—a plain old television program” (639). Yet Steeply’s narrative of events reveals that his father’s entertainment addiction

might not be all that different from the Entertainment after all. Steeply continues, “God knows I was attached to my share of shows. That’s all it started as. An attachment or habit” (639). He goes on to explain that, during the first run of *M\*A\*S\*H*, his father scheduled his Thursday evenings around the Broadcast, admitting, however, that at that point “[i]t was hard to pinpoint anything wrong or consumptive” (639). The addiction progresses rapidly, Steeply narrates, with the change in the distribution of the show. As Steeply puts it, “But then: syndication” (639). As *M\*A\*S\*H* grows in popularity, it proliferates. No longer confined to the Broadcast first-run schedule, Mr. Steeply has the ability to enter the storyworld at a multiplicity of points and in varying chronology. In short, he is an early adopter of sorts—he embodies the new director ontology before distribution technology and marketing make that ontology easy for the masses. Mr. Steeply grows unable to resist a complete immersion in the storyworld, maintaining a written correspondence with actors and the characters they played, keeping a conspiracy notebook, and communicating only through conversation about *M\*A\*S\*H*. Steeply says, “It progressed very slowly. The gradual immersion. The withdrawal from life” (640). Even before the demise of broadcast TV and the rise of unlimited choice in the entertainment we consume, the potential for debilitating addiction to TV is there, Steeply implicitly argues.

While Mr. Steeply does not die *from* his addiction to *M\*A\*S\*H*, he does die in his recliner *watching* *M\*A\*S\*H*. Indeed, Steeply knows exactly which episode of *M\*A\*S\*H* his father was watching when he died, and he goes on to provide a summary for Marathe of the episode: “He died in his easy chair, set at full Recline, watching an episode in which Alda’s Hawkeye can’t stop sleepwalking and fears he’s going out of his fucking mind until a professional military therapist reassures him” (646). Marathe responds in his broken English, “Me, I too have seen this episode rerunning, in my childhood” (646). Steeply and Marathe, so often miscommunicating,

are able to connect through conversation about *M\*A\*S\*H*, neither of them noticing the irony therein. After Steeply finishes the story of his father, he describes to Marathe the expressions on the faces of those who have been exposed to the Entertainment , He says they are “Stuck. Fixed. Held. Trapped. As in trapped in some sort of middle. Between two things. Pulled apart in different directions” (647). Marathe interprets Steeply’s description as “cravings,” but Steeply replies, “Not even cravings so much. Emptier than that. As if he were stuck wondering. As if there was something he’d forgotten” (647). The addiction manifests in a subjectivity not unlike, again, the hero in Hal’s seventh grade essay, the man of non-action. Again, Marathe attempts to help Steeply explain what he means by suggesting the word “lost,” and again Steeply contradicts him, saying, “[n]ot lost, but misplaced” (648). As we have seen, Steeply began this exchange with the story of his father’s addiction to *M\*A\*S\*H* and ends it with his description of the unfortunate viewers of the Entertainment. The continuum Wallace establishes is thus here quite clear. The only difference between Mr. Steeply’s addiction to *M\*A\*S\*H* and any viewer’s addiction to the Entertainment is one of degree.

Wallace explores the transition from the Broadcast TV model to the InterLace model from several angles. In a passage near the middle of the book, Marathe, pretending to conduct a survey, interviews Orin about his perceived differences between life in the United States and life under O.N.A.N. Specifically, he asks Orin what about American life he misses. Orin, turning wistful, holds forth on television. InterLace, the entity that superseded broadcast television, now provides infinite choice in entertainment, but for Orin, the fact that the choice is infinite is a game-changer. Before, under the old rules of TV, viewers were passive receptacles, participating in what Wallace elsewhere calls an “orgy of spectatorship” (Lipsky 118). Orin goes on at length:



I miss commercials that were louder than the programs. I miss the phrases, “Order before midnight tonight” and “Save up to fifty percent or more.” I miss being told things were filmed before a live studio audience. I miss late-night anthems and shots of flags and fighter jets and leathery-faced Indian chiefs crying at litter. I miss “Sermonette” and “Evensong” and test patterns and being told how many megahertz something’s transmitter was broadcasting at [. . .] I miss sneering at something I love. How we used to gather in the checker-tiled kitchen in front of the old boxy cathode ray Sony whose reception was sensitive to airplanes and sneer at the commercial vapidness of broadcast stuff. (599-600)

Under InterLace, Orin claims, things are “not the same. The choice, see. It ruins it somehow. With television you were *subjected* to repetition. The familiarity was inflicted. Different now” (600). This is as far as Orin can go. He stumbles onto a relatively profound insight, but in characteristic Orin fashion,<sup>21</sup> as soon as he realizes that fact, he backs away from going any further. What is it about “the choice” that makes it “Different now”? Living in subsidized time and under the televisual reign of InterLace, one’s choice is fundamentally changed in at least two ways. First, one has absolute freedom of choice of content. No longer subjected to the whims of broadcast network scheduling, viewers choose what they want to watch. The ability to choose the content, however, is only half the equation. The viewer can also arrange the content into a customized flow, eliminating the original context of the broadcast flow. The narratives consumed televisually are no longer interrupted by commercials. The choice of content and context eliminates such interruption and, with it, the flow, the cadence of the age of availability. Wallace

---

<sup>21</sup> Orin is notably emotionally stunted, in large part due to his complicated relationship with both his mother and his father. A skilled womanizer, Orin only loves once—with Joelle Van Dyne. Orin’s team mate, Marlon Bain, hints at Orin’s emotional disconnectedness and the possibility of family abuse in note 269 (1047-1052).

elsewhere suggests that “when all experience can be deconstructed and reconfigured, there become simply too many choices” (“E. Unibus”191). Wallace is clearly critical—and a little scared—of the shift in distribution methods because he thinks it highlights a problem he thinks we may not be equipped to handle. That is, given this unlimited choice, we are actually rendered powerless because the cultural evolution has brought us to a place of immediate, albeit illusory, satisfaction of desire, that we will sit there and beg for our own destruction. At the same time, he also understands that there is no going back, and that while we can and should engage the problem critically, we must accept the technological changes as part of the ever-evolving system of culture.

Indeed, after a long paragraph describing the technical specifications of the latest Inter-Lace teleputer equipment, the narrator says, “Saying this is bad is like saying traffic is bad, or health-care surtaxes, or the hazards of annular fusion: nobody but Ludditic granola-crunching freaks would call bad what no one can imagine being without” (620). The narrator qualifies this announcement with the following statement, however: “But so very much private watching of customized screens behind drawn curtains in the dreamy familiarity of home. A floating no-space world of personal spectation. Whole new millennial era [. . .] Total freedom, privacy, choice” (620). This unlimited choice, the narrator argues, arouses a sense of nostalgia for the witness ontology: “Hence the new millennium’s passion for standing live witness to things” (620). In “E. Unibus Pluram,” Wallace even argues that Americans are now “united by common images. What binds us became what we stood witness to” (166). He goes on to describe the fascination with viewing things not just live, but in person: “The fellowship and anonymous communion of being part of a watching crowd, a mass of eyes all not at home, all out in the world and pointed the same way” (621). Witnessing an event in person, without TV’s mediation, be-

comes a highly sought-after experience. This romanticizing of momentary “witnessing” signifies a nostalgic longing for the era of the witness as an escape from the overwhelming burden of unlimited choice.

The enslavement to televisual entertainment is nowhere more evident than in James Incandenza’s final, lethal movie, *Infinite Jest* V or VI (it is a source of argument among Incandenza scholars whether the final version was the fifth or the sixth cut). A close analysis of the text is a bit difficult, however, for as Marshall Boswell points out, no one has seen the movie directly (126). All we have to go on are rumors, descriptions in snippet form, and second hand accounts. But by piecing together the accounts, we can get an idea of both the content and the structure of Incandenza’s self-proclaimed “perfect entertainment” that would “paralyze people” (940).<sup>22</sup> The film seems to open with Joelle and another, androgynous character chasing each other through a revolving door, the film thereby opening with a loop (939). A later scene shows Joelle’s character leaning over a crib, presumably, since the camera lens, made by Incandenza himself, employs an “ocular wobble” meant to “reproduce an infantile visual field” (940). In this scene, Joelle is both veiled and quite pregnant, and she goes through “at least twenty minutes of permutations of ‘I’m sorry’” (939). Underlying this infantile narcissism, as Mary K. Holland calls it (238), is Incandenza’s “Death-cosmology” (788). According to Molly Notkin, a friend of Joelle’s interviewed by the U.S.O.U.S. operative, the lethal cartridge

---

<sup>22</sup> These words are filtered through Joelle van Dyne in an interview with an operative either for A.F.R. or the U.S.O.U.S (the narrative remains unclear on this point). Joelle insists that James Incandenza said that the film was perfect or that it would “paralyze people” ironically and “as a *joke*” (IJ 940, emphasis in original). In fact, the views we do get of the movie are multiply mediated. Joelle has only seen some scenes, but she was *in* all of them, so she has a unique perspective, though not really a perspective that anyone else can understand. She is the only one who fully inhabited that storyworld, and she therefore cannot see what the viewer sees. Molly Notkin, another source for the content of the film, is not a terribly reliable narrator, and her version of events seem a bit overdetermined by her theoretical frameworks. The medium through which we get the narrative of the film, in other words, matters a great deal, if only to provide the “certainty” of ambiguity.

features Madame Psychosis [Joelle's alter-ego, a late night disc-jockey] as some kind of maternal instantiation of the archetypal figure Death, sitting naked, corporeally gorgeous, ravishing, hugely pregnant, her hideously deformed face either veiled or blanked out by undulating computer-generated squares of color or anamorphosized into unrecognizability as any kind of face by the camera's apparently very strange and novel lens, sitting there nude, explaining in very simple child-like language to whomever the film's camera represents that Death is always female, and that the female is always maternal. I.e. that the woman who kills you is always your next life's mother. (788)

This description of the film invites overtly psychoanalytic readings. As Holland points out, "the film, itself endlessly looping, reproduces the closed loop of infantile narcissism, the repetition compulsion in which all characters are stuck as they yearn for infant's comfort, unwilling to endure the pain, or unpleasure, necessary to break out of it" (238). Whereas Holland's reading draws mostly from Freud, Marshall Boswell turns to Lacanian psychoanalysis, arguing that the lethal Entertainment both "embodies and parodies" Lacanian ideas (130). Boswell insists that *Infinite Jest* "demonstrates that Lacan's model of the psychological subject is a seductive but ultimately alienating and harmful idea that can and should be overcome" (128). As Boswell would have it, Wallace parodies Lacanian theory taken to its extreme.

While both Holland and Boswell point out the psychoanalytic dimensions of the movie *Infinite Jest*, neither fully account for the centrality of the narrative to the film. James Incandenza's career weakness is known to be narrative. Before his death, Incandenza went to Lyle, the resident ETA guru, "complaining that even in his commercially entertaining stuff Incandenza's fatal Achilles' heel was plot, that Incandenza's efforts had no sort of engaging plot, no move-

ment that sucked you in and drew you along” (375). Joelle muses that Incandenza’s work was “amateurish” and “[m]ore like the work of a brilliant optician and technician who was an amateur at any kind of real communication. Technically gorgeous, the Work, with lighting and angles planned out to the frame. But oddly hollow, empty, no sense of dramatic *towardness*—no narrative movement toward a real story; no emotional movement toward an audience” (740).

With *Infinite Jest*, however, he overcomes this weakness. While the actual narrative that takes place in the film is minimal, the underpinning of the Death-cosmology, not merely narrative, but, indeed, sweeping in its scope, provides the narrative framework that makes the revolving, looping, and wobbling Entertainment cartridge so lethal to viewers. While the psychoanalytic elements of the Entertainment are clearly there, the truly crucial component to *Infinite Jest* V or VI’s success as a “perfect entertainment” is the marriage (at last) of technical brilliance with a narrative foundation that supports and is, in turn, supported by Incandenza’s technical innovations. But, like the critical mass reached when the ad industry became too good at doing what they do, Incandenza’s film is too perfect. The marriage of sweeping narrative and technical innovations produces a text so powerful that it becomes a weapon. The thoughtless consumption of Entertainment after Entertainment ultimately results in a regression so complete that the viewer becomes the hero of non-action.

Whether James Incandenza intended to make a perfect Entertainment is up for debate (again, the text supports several possibilities on this front). Indeed, his reasons for making *Infinite Jest* are as varied as the people asked to give them. Joelle says of James,

“He talked about making something quote too perfect. But as a *joke*. He had a thing about entertainment being critical about entertainment v. nonentertainment and stasis. He used to refer to the Work itself as ‘entertainments.’ He always

meant it ironically [. . .] So Jim took a failed piece and told me it was too perfect to release—it'd paralyze people. It was entirely clear that it was an ironic joke.

To me. (940)

Joelle's tenuous narrative tone suggests that she might be questioning her own reading of Incandenza's intentions. Her interrogation responses read like she is trying to convince herself of their truth, making her account as questionable as the account from James Incandenza's ghost, the wraith that appears to Don Gately during his fevered dreams. His goal in making the lethal Entertainment, the wraith insists, was to communicate in some real way to his youngest son (Hal). He says,

Make something so bloody compelling it would reverse thrust on a young self's fall into the womb of solipsism, anhedonia, death in life. A magically entertaining toy to dangle at the infant still somewhere alive in the boy, to make its eyes light and toothless mouth open unconsciously, to laugh. To bring him 'out of himself,' as they say. The womb could be used both ways. A way to say I AM SO VERY, VERY SORRY and have it *heard*. A life-long dream. The scholars and Foundations and disseminators never saw that his most serious wish was: *to entertain*. (839)

According to this account, James wanted to help his son, who was already on a path to addiction and depression—a path James knew all too well. So he makes something so “compelling,” so entertaining, that Hal might respond to it. But the wraith's insistence that his aim was always to entertain is a dubious claim. It seems quite clear, from what

we know of Incandenza's life and work, that he is more interested in the *avant* (or *après-garde*) nature of the work he produces.<sup>23</sup>

In his extended interview with Lipsky, Wallace confides that the original title for *Infinite Jest* was *A Failed Entertainment*:

The idea is that the book is structured as an entertainment that doesn't work. Because what entertainment ultimately leads to, I think, is the movie *Infinite Jest*. I mean, that's the star it's steering by. Entertainment's chief job is to make you so riveted by it that you can't tear your eyes away, so the advertisers can advertise. And the tension of the book is try to make it at once extremely entertaining—and also sort of warped, and to sort of shake the reader awake about some of the things that are sinister in entertainment. (79)

Wallace's assertions here that Incandenza's *Infinite Jest* is a failed entertainment directly contradicts Joelle's assertion that it was, rather, a *perfect* entertainment. But it is actually both perfect and failed simultaneously, just as George Giles was simultaneously *passé* and *flunké*. More precisely, it was so perfect that it failed at what it was intended to do. Like the advertising industry's critical blow to the Broadcast system through its perfect manipulation of consumers, James Incandenza hones his craft so well that he makes something too perfect to be entertaining.

---

<sup>23</sup> For James Incandenza's full filmography, see footnote 24, pages 985-993 in the text. For one example to illustrate the dubious nature of James's claim to desire only to entertain, I quote from the listing for the Entertainment entitled *Cage III*, a free carnival sideshow "whose spectators watch performers undergo unspeakable degradations so grotesquely compelling that the spectators' eyes become larger and larger until the spectators themselves are transformed into gigantic eyeballs in chairs, while on the other side of the sideshow tent the figure of life (Heaven) uses a megaphone to invite fairgoers to an exhibition in which, if the fairgoers consent to undergo unspeakable degradations, they can witness ordinary persons gradually turn into gigantic eyeballs" (988). I point to this Entertainment specifically because of its polyvalent representation of observation and Entertainment. Each entry reads very much like this one. James Incandenza was by no account (save his own) interested in entertaining.

In this chapter I hope to have shown the continuum along which televisual media, narrativity, and subjectivity travel and intersect. Televisual narrative changes us—DeLillo and Wallace agree on that. The shift in epistemological frameworks—namely, narrative’s increased technological mediation—catalyzes a shift in our ontologies as well. For DeLillo, we become so inundated with information that we give our agency over to the machine, and for Wallace, we have such choice (false agency) in our TV Entertainment that we look like we change but are just as enslaved as ever. Regardless of the particular mechanisms at work on the production and distribution level, our subjectivities are profoundly tied to the TV’s role in our lives and the relationship we develop with it as our supernarrator. Wallace’s teleputer, foreshadowing the systems many of us now have in our homes, problematizes the notion that the TV as object has a thingness to which we can turn as an Other. The TV, in other words, is beginning to merge, as Wallace predicted, with a larger system of Entertainment, a presence eventually so ubiquitous that we cannot imagine life without it. We cannot imagine it because its presence works on us, runs in the system, interacts with psychic systems, spiraling the system outward, ever changing and always becoming. The work it does on us produces a posthuman director ontology. This chapter underscores the skepticism toward and fear of TV’s power to change us ontologically; the next chapter explores more optimistic views of the evolution of the second-order observer to the director ontology, which both precedes and creates the conditions of possibility for narrative agency.



## CHAPTER THREE

### CHANGING THE STORY: NARRATIVE AGENCY IN RON MOORE'S *BATTLESTAR GALACTICA* AND JOSS WHEDON'S *DOLLHOUSE*

*It's been an honor to be your storyteller.*

—Ronald D. Moore, personal blog

*I've been fascinated by the questions of identity and identity manipulation, both self-imposed and otherwise, and the idea of avatars and the idea of fantasy and the little insular world that we've been able to create for ourselves with our computers and with our extraordinarily specific medications.*

—Joss Whedon, interview with Matt Goldberg

This chapter examines two television narratives, Ron Moore's *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009) and Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse* (2009-2010), arguing that, when the ontological and epistemological processes described in chapters one and two enter into conscious awareness, we begin to assert narrative agency. With narrative agency comes the ability to change the story in at least two directions: one process changes the self story, and indeed, this usually happens first, and the other process changes the larger story in which that self is placed. Further, chapter four attempts to tease out some of the complex relationships and interconnections between the content of these TV texts and their method of production and distribution. In particular, I examine the revisionist and collaborative qualities of both series. I argue that these two TV texts carry important textual echoes of their method of production, and that these echoes reflect a mutual co-creating of (post)human subjects and televisually mediated narrative.

Scholars disagree on the usefulness of taking into account the conditions of possibility for the narrative. The composition process is often explicitly devalued or simply overlooked in critical treatments of texts. In her seminal book, *Narratology*, Meike Bal argues that narrative “is a cultural phenomenon, partaking of cultural processes” and that “it is the conditions of possibility of those processes that constitute the interest of narrative analysis” (9). She does not believe, however, that the actual process of creating narrative is worth critical attention: “[H]ow writers proceed we cannot know. Nor do we need, or even want to” (9). On this point, I disagree. In other areas of scholarship, the process of composition has become at times more important than the final product. The most obvious example is in the rise of process-oriented theories and pedagogies in composition studies, but Jeremy Green applies these principles to a critique of postmodern American fiction in his book *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millenium*, which he describes as “an examination of the generative pressures on contemporary writing, a study of how the various cultural and economic forces that now impinge on writers condition the relationship between literary strategy and literary field” (5). In “Toward a Socionarratology: New Ways of Analyzing Natural-Language Narratives,” David Herman combines narratological methodologies with sociolinguistic ones to create a socionarratology that seeks to explore narrative not just as a product but also a process. He argues that “[t]his merging of theories and methodologies suggests that any analysis of narrative structure must be complemented by an account of how storytellers communicate” (223). He states that:

rather than being consigned beforehand to the domain of the random and unpredictable, facts about the production and processing of stories should be anchored in the actual practice of participants engaged in narrative communication. Put otherwise, by changing our methods for studying narrative, we may discover un-

expected patterns in the way that stories are used to facilitate communication.

(220)

Following Green and Herman, I look at the texts through the lens of their production and dissemination, the conditions of its telling. In this way, the content of the text itself becomes a fractal of the conditions of existence of the text—the process of its composition, production, distribution, and reception. This section argues that the conditions of possibility for these narratives, and other ones like them, are inscribed into the texts themselves. Specifically, the collaborative nature of storytelling as is demanded by the division of labor necessary for a television show to be successful, fosters the development of characters who themselves achieve narrative agency by virtue of a greater awareness of narrative options. The narrative proper, that is, seen through the lens of its method of creation, is thereby diffracted in such a way as to create self-similar patterns (or fractals) in both the narrative content and the narrative form.

Indeed, I argue that TV itself has subjectivized through its interaction with us, and I point in particular to *BSG*'s status as a revision of an old show. The original *Battlestar Galactica* (1978 and 1980), created by Glen A. Larson, ran for one season, was canceled, and then was picked back up as a sort of sequel show, with a much lower budget and a literally earth-bound cast of (mostly new) characters. Fans rejected this first re-imagining immediately, and ABC canceled it after ten episodes. While it is by no means the first re-imagining of an old show (or even the first re-imagining of *this* show), the 2004 reboot of *BSG*, created and produced by Ronald D. Moore, retreads old ground with a decidedly new spin on the show's aesthetic and philosophical aspects. Pulling the viewer into its storyworld, and indeed pulling the viewer's storyworld into the narrative, the re-imagined *BSG* seems somehow to have been inevitable. From its beginning, then, the show was always revising—and re-visioning—its central story. In addition

to its unique broadcast history, the storyworld of *Battlestar Galactica* seems stuck in the American Science Fiction imaginary. Richard Hatch (Apollo on the original series and anarchist Tom Zarek in the 2003 series), Bryan Singer, and Glen Larsen all made failed attempts to bring the show back to life throughout the 1990s and early 2000s before Ronald Moore's spin on the story with such a promising premise took hold (*BSG* wiki).

Re-visioning a text is possible, here, by virtue of second-order observation, or, more precisely, by the re-entry of the observer into the narrative frame. In other words, the re-telling of the story is itself an act of a participating observer. Ron Moore watched the original TV show, then quite literally rewrote it (obviously not single-handedly). Similarly, Joss Whedon's status as TV cult show fan favorite enabled him to undertake the re-visioning of some of the philosophical aspects of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* while simultaneously creating a new narrative platform from which to advance overtly feminist agendas. Indeed, scholars have pointed out that *Dollhouse* in many ways rewrites such old (and usually patriarchal) narratives as *Sleeping Beauty* (St. Louis and Riggs), *R.U.R.* (Koontz and Noone), *The Canterbury Tales* (Masson), and Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (Wilcox). In chapter one I argued that second-order observation is a crucial component of posthuman subjectivization, pointing to the inscription of the observer into the narrative. The observer ontology transforms in chapter two, however, into a director ontology as we consume more and more technologically mediated stories. Our engagement with narrative on a more technologically sophisticated level results in more than observing ourselves observing; we become more active in directing that which is being observed. In this chapter, I argue that the director ontology gives way to the narrative agent ontology in these televisual texts that echo in their form and content the collaborative and revisionist nature of their conditions of possibility and of their telling.

The narrative agent ontology surfaces most strongly in two lead female characters, the Eight Model in *BSG* and Echo in *Dollhouse*. Through an examination of the subjectivization processes of these characters, we can see templates for how we might imagine a posthuman ontology. Embedded within these possible ontologies is a reliance upon narrative to come to be as a subject. Indeed, it is precisely the characters' positionality with regard to their narratives (micro- and macro-) that manifests the posthuman potential. In what follows, I explore the subjectivization of Athena, the Eight Model who is positioned within the text to be our cylon ancestor. In particular, I trace her use of narrative to become as a subject, further situating narrative's crucial role in our subjectivities as well as the place of technology in narrative and narrative in technology. Similarly, Echo, the protagonist in *Dollhouse*, exemplifies a posthuman narrative ontology because her subjectivization process, enacted in, through, and by narrative, involves changing the story after finding her place within it.

### ***Battlestar Galactica***

The opening credit titles to the first season of *BSG* offer a good starting place for the introduction into the storyworld: The cylons were created by man. They rebelled. They evolved. They look and feel human. Some are programmed to think they are human. There are many copies. And they have a plan.” As the narrative of the reboot begins, the latest cylon attack on the human colonies, forty years after a truce between them, has destroyed almost all of humanity. Roughly 50,000 survivors remain—a small few left on the colonies, the majority on fleet spaceships that survived the cylon attack. The *Galactica* is the only remaining Battlestar, and its commander, William Adama, is now Admiral of the fleet. Adama and Colonial President Laura Roslin, who inherited her office through the chain of command after the attack on the Twelve Colonies, lead the fleet on a journey to find the mythical lost colony, Earth.

As I mentioned in chapter one, *BSG* brings to this retelling of an old story (patterned on still older stories) an aesthetic and philosophical framework that far outpaces the original series. The final episode of the series, “Daybreak Part 2,” reveals that the cylons do eventually find Earth, and they decide to stay there to interbreed with the human population on the planet—humans so early in their evolution that they have not yet acquired language. In other words, we, the viewers, are the descendants of the Colonial fleet. Some of the cylon models accompany the humans to Earth. Indeed, not only are cylons present, but the first hybrid human-cylon child, Hera, becomes, according to the epilogue at the end of the episode, our “Mitochondrial Eve,” the crucial turning point for human evolution. In short, we are all always already part cylon. This revelation catalyzes an ontological shift in the viewer, pulling her into the storyworld and the storyworld into her world. I look specifically at Hera’s cylon mother, Sharon Valerri, also called “Athena,” as well as Athena’s “sister,” the other Eight Model who took the identity of Sharon Valerri (and goes by the call sign “Boomer”) in order to explore the cylon side of that turn to hybridity, the turn towards the merging of the terms of a binary into a third term, into a posthuman subjectivization process.<sup>24</sup>

In chapter one, I established my definition of subjectivization based on the psychoanalytic theories of Lacan, Butler, and Žižek as well as postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha and theorists of narrative identity. In short, we come to be as subjects by virtue of *being subject to* discursive and material narratives and structures of power, but what we come to know as our “I”

---

<sup>24</sup> A note on names and brief summary of the plot as it pertains to the Eight models under analysis: The name “Boomer” designates specifically the first Eight model the viewer meets, the sleeper cylon agent who gives her allegiance to the cylons, with a few exceptions, until the very end, when she rescues Hera and gives her back to Athena. The name “Athena” designates the agent who the cylons sent to seduce Helo on Caprica. The endgame is to see whether the addition of love will allow cylons to conceive. Athena succeeds in her mission, but she also falls in love with Helo. She breaks away from the cylons and sides with the humans, eventually donning the colonial uniform and carrying the call sign “Athena.” Hera is the child of Athena and Helo.

is not the whole story. Whether we think of the surplus of our discursive selves in terms of the traumatic kernel, as Žižek does, or in terms of the psychic remainder, as Butler does, the surplus persists and haunts our subjectivities. Further, both of these accounts presuppose some essence. The monadic subject is certainly dispensed with, yet something fundamental to the human nags at the edges of the carefully constructed (and at least somewhat fictional) self. However, adding a bit of cybernetic theory to the mix, Bruce Clarke, addressing the theories of Bruno Latour, which account for the equating of humans with cybernetic forms of intelligence, argues that such a view of “life” provides liberation from essence (55). He states,

Latour’s parallel view of the morphism of the human is a neocybernetic turn putting operational flesh on the bones of the postmodern observation that the human is a rhetorical construction. Indeed, the human lies not in the possession of an essence but in the eliciting and instrumentalizing of a conviction, in a persuasion that is present—but also, in Latour’s terms, in the continuous translation of itself into being by social communications. (Clarke 59)

This way of looking at human agency or subjectivity is profoundly in line with the ontological shift put forward by the narrative of *BSG*. The push and pull between an essence-based subjectivity and an active, process-based construction of subjectivity is precisely what is at stake in the narratives of both Boomer and Athena, and it mirrors the push and pull of signifier and signified that Bhabha identifies as the locus of subjectivization. The Eight model’s struggle, ultimately, is negotiating the space between essence and conviction in order to adapt and to create something new, something hybrid.

Part of that negotiation of essence and conviction revolves around creating and maintaining a self-story, a narratively-organized account for one’s being. In his article, “Frak-tured

Postmodern Lives, Or, How I Found Out I Was a Cylon,” Paul Booth highlights the connection between identity and narrative, arguing that the piecing together of the narrative whole by the *BSG* viewers (taking into account the webisodes and other marginal yet canonical texts) mirrors the piecing together of one’s own sense of self in a postmodern world (18-23). This construction of self and world through narrative should not be viewed as a finite process with the *telos* either the self or the story. Rather, the construction of self is a recursive (and discursive) feedback loop between narrative and ontology. In short, who we are determines our stories and our stories determine who we are. Each moment of “determination” adds to the data that both constructs and gets constructed, resulting in endless movement, but not a prescribed *telos* (much like the numeral 8 itself). This narrative-ontology cycle plays itself out within the story itself, as each character both discovers and creates who they are. The ways in which both Boomer and Athena negotiate their identities and their subjectivities through what is considered their essence and what is within the power of their choice inform what we take away from the narrative in terms of our own ontological moorings.

#### *Micronarratives of BSG: The Eight Model*

The Eight model has incited a good deal of scholarly work already, most of which predates the final episode and thus the revelation of the Eight model’s overwhelming importance. Indeed, none of the other cylon models figure as prominently in critical examinations, a testament to the time spent by the narrative developing Eight’s importance to (post)humanity. A brief tour through the highlights of scholarship touching heavily upon the Eight provides a snapshot of the kinds of issues brought to the fore by Boomer/Athena. Juliana Hu Pegues approaches the identity of the Eight model through a postcolonial lens, arguing that the racial identification of Sharon (or rather, of Grace Park) harkens back to the Madame Butterfly/ Miss Saigon model,



with all its attendant (and problematic) tropes (189-209). Amy Kind explores the persistence of Sharon from Boomer to Athena, examining and problematizing the personal versus physical theories of identity (64-74). Following Kierkegaard's theories of subjectivity, Robert W. Moore argues that Sharon becomes a person through deliberate choice. The first step of the developing personhood is individuation, he claims. Then, Sharon maps her identity through the roles that she plays, primarily wife, mother, and colonial officer (105-17). Robert Arp and Tracie Mahaffey, focusing primarily on the Eight model, lead their readers through syllogistic logic, proving that cylons are, in fact, persons (55-63). George Dunn argues that Boomer's struggle to accept a cylon/human hybridity has everything to do with drawing lines between good and evil, but that she ultimately must align with the cylons for the sake of creating and maintaining a coherent sense of self (127-40). Daniel Milsky uses a Ricouer-inspired narrative theory to highlight the ways in which both Boomer and Athena deal with narrative disruptions (both disruptions of fact and of belief) (3-15). The Eight model incites so much critical discourse in part because her representations (particularly those of Boomer and Athena) create, fulfill, and/or problematize a variety of important narrative functions. The Eight model, more than the other models (with the possible exception of the Six), shows the struggle between humanism and posthumanism, between accepting one's prior narrative and asserting authorship privileges and revising the story to reflect a hybridized identity.

Despite all the critical attention the Eight has generated, no one seems to have entertained any psychoanalytic theories as they might pertain to cylon becoming, perhaps because of the belief that cylons, programmed to be who they are, do not fall prey to the psychological shortcomings of humans. But we must remember that cylons were programmed to be as close, psychologically, to humans as possible. They must be able to be programmed, like Boomer, to believe

beyond the shadow of a doubt that they are, in fact, human. The psyche that haunts a cylon is at the very least quite similar to that of a human.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the two most evident traits of the Eight model, speaking generally, are her need to situate herself within a coherent narrative, even if that means compartmentalizing her psychic remainder in order to keep the narrative functional, and her insistence that she have the right and the ability to make her own choices. In short, she is compelled both to discover her self and to create her self.

The Eight model's subjectivization hinges on the narrative she tells herself. Daniel Milsky argues that for both Boomer and Athena, narrative disruptions (both disruptions of fact and of belief) drive how the Eight model finds/creates/constructs her identity. The way each version of the Eight deals with the competing internal narratives is consistent with the way that model specifically (and perhaps the cylon brain more generally, and perhaps still more generally, the human brain) confronts and deals with narrative disruptions (which bring with them a psychic remainder that proves difficult to eradicate); the results differ in that Athena aligns with the humans and Boomer with the Cylons (although Boomer seems to have a human remainder, evidenced by the fact that she repays her debt to Adama in an eleventh hour decision that affirms her will to hybridity). Milsky's "narrative disruptions" are simply places in Athena/Boomer's stories of self that no longer add up, that call into question either her identity or her beliefs (Milsky 5-8). These moments of disruption result in sites of contestation and ultimately lead to the creation of a hybrid subjectivity, one that takes into account the psychic remainder and rejects the absolute authority of the discursive power structures attempting to normalize the subjectivization process for each model (for the cylons) or soldier/citizen (for the humans).

---

<sup>25</sup> For evidence of this retention of the human psyche, one need look no further than Cavil's dalliance with Ellen in a classic Oedipal chain of desire ("Razor").

The moments of narrative disruption often lead to determining instances, moments in the story where the Eight model must assert individual choice. Whereas the other models view their individual agency as subordinate to the collective cylon subjectivity, the Eight insists upon her individual subjectivity; she demands the right to personal choice. Whether choosing to be the best machine she can be and voting against her model or choosing to align with the humans despite the way the majority of them feel about her “essential” being, she demands a sort of Hegelian recognition. When Cavil, the One model and leader of the Cylons, reveals that Boomer has voted against her model, the leader Six reacts violently, declaring such a thing “unconscionable” and “wrong.” Six says, “Our identities are determined by our models. Each model is unique. We belong together” (“Six of One”). Cavil responds with Six’s own words from an earlier discussion: “Something has changed.” Something did change, and it began with the Eight model. While part of Boomer’s decision was likely Cavil’s influence and manipulation and part of it was her traumatic experience living among the humans, the possibility of voting against one’s model was not on the cylons’ metaphorical DRADIS.<sup>26</sup> It simply was not done. Something about the Eight’s programming, or rather, the Eight’s ability to *exceed* her programming, allowed this change to occur. Much of the telos of the *BSG* narrative, and therefore the viewer’s origin, is dependent on the Eight model’s insistence on being free to choose her own path, to carve out her own individuality. Both Boomer’s and Athena’s narrative trajectories exhibit this will to hybridity through choice.

### *Boomer*

---

<sup>26</sup> DRADIS in the *BSG* storyworld is the analogue to our RADAR. Like RADAR, DRADIS is an acronym, and though never stated directly in the show, the fan community’s understanding (based on drafts of early scripts) is that it stands for Direction, RAnge, DIStance (*BSG* Wiki).

For season one Boomer, being a cylon is itself a symptom. The fact of her cylon ontology as well as the episodes of programmed but unremembered cylon behavior slip into the margins of the narrative of her identity, resulting in a highly fractured sense of self (Milsky 10). Her cylon identity is, at this point, her psychic remainder. As a sleeper agent, she thinks she is human until Cavil, the One model stationed on the *Galactica*, gives her the signal that pulls her out of her sleeper status. Despite the fact that when she is out of sleeper status she is fully cognizant of her mission as a cylon agent, the human part of her haunts her. The psychic remainder, that bit of her that she could not get the story to consume neatly, ultimately sways her to botch her assassination of Adama, technically fulfilling Cavil's orders, but failing to do lasting damage to the humans. Before agreeing to shoot Adama, she says to Cavil, "I'm happier when I'm under. I'm happier when I'm human. I like myself, love myself, then" ("The Plan"). Cavil insists that the human cover is merely a construct: "They know your lies. I know you" ("The Plan"). Indeed, the cylon part of Boomer becomes like the unconscious. Gaius Baltar's angelic Caprica Six tells him that "deep down she knows she's a cylon, but her conscious mind won't accept it. . . her model is weak, always has been" ("Kobol's Last Gleaming: Part 1").<sup>27</sup> Baltar returns to this idea to get information from Boomer after she is imprisoned on *Galactica*. He says to her, "Deep down in that thing you call a subconscious, you remember" ("Resistance"). Baltar's word choices here are striking. The cylons, he implies, have copied humans so thoroughly that they, too, are saddled with that repository of all the baser fears, needs, and desires—the unconscious. Baltar forces Boomer to let her conscious mind touch this repository, no matter how painful.

---

<sup>27</sup> Gaius Baltar is the scientist responsible for the betrayal of the human race. Manipulated by the Six model's ability to exploit his libido, he allows her access to the defense mainframe of the Twelve Colonies, though he is not consciously aware that she is a Cylon when he does so. He is thereafter haunted by a hallucinatory presence of the Six model who is revealed to be an angelic presence.

Imprisoned after shooting Adama, the sleeper agent is awakened once more by Cavil to reprimand her for only wounding Adama. She tells him, “The only way that I could get this done was to turn myself into a centurion. I could feel my skin turning hard. I could feel the bullets making their way through the channels under my hard metal skin. I couldn’t feel my heart beat. If there was any part of us that’s human, in that moment, I killed that” (“The Plan”). Cavil argues that the eradication of all human roots is desirable, but she insists, “I lost the best part of myself” (“The Plan”). Even as a fully cognizant Eight model, then, she turns to the humanity she feels as part of her identity, rejecting a subjectivity defined as solely cylon. That is, she turns to the hybridity that she finds in the third space, the space between the fully cylon agent and the fully human soldier.

After Boomer is shot and downloads into another body, she still finds it difficult to embrace a wholly cylon identity. Joining with Caprica Six, Boomer attempts to bridge the gap between humans and cylons by trying to coexist with them on New Caprica. The project is a failure, however, and she eventually falls back under the sway of Cavil, who, she says, is “teaching [her] to be a better machine, to let go of [her] human constructs” (“No Exit”). When a downloaded Ellen tries to explain to Boomer that her human traits are gifts, the most important one being the capacity for love, Boomer replies, “Love? Who? Humans? Why would I want to do that?” (“No Exit”).<sup>28</sup> In spite of this malice towards humans cultivated in part by Cavil and in part by Boomer herself as a defense mechanism to deflect her attention away from the psychic remainder of being human, Boomer’s trust in Cavil begins to wane after she brings Hera back to the colony. Her crisis is two-fold. First, the presence of Hera seems to remind her of her own

---

<sup>28</sup> Ellen, introduced first as the wife of the *Galactica*’s XO, Colonel Tigh, is revealed in season four to be the final cylon (colonel Tigh is also revealed to be a member of the final five). Ellen, along with the other members of the final five, created the seven models of which there are many copies.

possibilities as an individual open to a hybrid identity. Even though Hera clearly does not recognize Boomer as her mother, genetically, she is. Second, she had once again to lose the best part of herself by betraying Tyrol as well as the fantasy projection that helps her cope.<sup>29</sup> In Boomer's projection fantasy, one cultivated carefully and passionately over time, her psychic remainder becomes clear. She is haunted by the potential, which her choices persistently deferred, to procreate. She longs for a child, a daughter; that is, she longs for precisely what her "sister" Athena already has. She admits that she still loves Tyrol and that it is with him that she wants a child, but she uses the fact that he still loves her to manipulate him in order to fulfill her mission. Boomer's crisis hinges on the fact that she can and does love, and that that love can, but in her case will not, result in sexual procreation. Her betrayal of Tyrol is only part of what becomes her most insistent psychic remainder—the unfulfilled desire for heterosexual coupling that results in reproduction.

Boomer's repressed humanity eventually returns. In the guise of repaying an old debt to Adama, Boomer saves Hera after having forsaken the only people she truly loved in order to capture her. She says to Athena: "We all make our choices. Today I made a choice. I think it was my last one" ("Daybreak: Part 2"). Boomer's choice was not merely to help the humans. Her choice was to exercise her ability to individuate and to refuse the wholly cylon path of subjectivization. She aligns with a possibility for a hybridized future by rejecting, and exceeding, her programming. It is too late for her to have a child of her own, but Hera represents the hybridity she desires, and that is enough to compel her to return Hera to Athena and Helo. Cavil remarks

---

<sup>29</sup> Chief Galen Tyrol is another member of the final five. He was involved in a relationship with Boomer at the beginning of the series. After learning he is a cylon, Boomer shares her projection fantasy wherein she and Tyrol have a child. Tyrol's emotional vulnerability allows him to be easily manipulated, and Boomer uses this to her advantage to kidnap Hera.

that he simply miscalculated the Eight's need to indulge in "gestures of futility." For Cavil, the "gesture of futility" is a turn away from the cylon race or ontology. For the viewer, it is a turn toward a revision to the story, a hybridized ontology. For the viewer, Boomer at last becomes "human." It is precisely this humanity that Cavil rejects out of hand, but the acknowledging of her humanity—that is, her capacity and willingness to do so—is what qualifies the Eight model for the mythically momentous role she plays in the story.

### *Athena*

Athena's story contains many of the same elements as Boomer's, but the order in which each presents itself differs, a difference that, it turns out, makes all the difference. Athena makes her decision early into her assignment to betray the cylons and align with the humans, and she must go to great lengths to win first Helo's and then Adama's trust in the wake of Boomer's betrayal. When Athena tells Helo, who has just discovered that she is a cylon, that she is carrying his child, she assures him that what she feels for Helo is genuine and that what is between them is "the next step" ("Kobol's Last Gleaming: Part 2"). Even this early in the narrative, Athena understands the importance of the child she carries. After telling Helo that she has to "take matters into [her] own hands," she proves to Adama that she can be trusted by averting an attempt on his life. Lowering the gun she has trained on Adama, she says, "I need you to know something. I'm Sharon, but I'm a different Sharon. I know who I am. I don't have any hidden protocols or programs lying in wait to be activated. I make my own choices and I need you to know this is my choice" ("Home: Part 2"). This Eight model makes that crucial choice early enough in the narrative to catalyze a hybrid subjectivization process. While she does not have "hidden protocols," she does have a constructed, even fabricated, identity. She does not identify, that is, as Eight Model, but rather as Sharon Valerii, the identity created to infiltrate the humans. That con-

structed psyche, however, is not the end of the story. Athena becomes a posthuman subject the moment she rejects the notion that her “I” is equal to the constructs of her personality. The choices she makes within the confines of those constructs are what matters. In other words, unlike Boomer, she is able to address her psychic remainder productively, in a way conducive to embracing hybridity.

Robert Moore argues that Athena must create her identity in stages by solidifying her varying roles in the overarching story. She is simultaneously wife, mother, and colonial officer, and it is through living out the stories surrounding each of these roles that she creates a sort of hybrid identity (112-14). In this particular case of hybridity, she actively accepts, even embraces, both the things that make her cylon and the things that make her human. She *is* a cylon, but she *becomes* human. But because she *is* a cylon, she becomes not-quite-yet-more-than-human. She becomes posthuman and arguably post-cylon. Bhabha’s formulation of subjectivity is useful here: active subjectivity is “the return of an image of identity that bears the mark of splitting in the Other place from which it comes” (63-64). A repetition with a difference that makes subjectivity and individuation possible, the hybridity that results from this neither all cylon nor all human identity creates a third space—a space wherein Athena (and eventually Boomer) enact “new and hybrid agencies,” rearticulating and re-visioning what constitutes being human, what constitutes being cylon, and what constitutes a possible hybridized human-cylon ontology.

The crucial role that Athena fills in the larger narrative is mother. Hera is, after all, the endgame of the narrative. This fact belies a problematic valorizing of sexual reproduction and, with it, compulsory heterosexuality. Indeed, it is arguable that it is precisely because Athena gets pregnant so quickly and develops the parental bond with Helo that she creates the conditions of possibility for her hybrid subjectivization. The narrative certainly shows less of Athena’s psych-



ic remainder than it does of Boomer's, presumably because Athena's status as mother trumps whatever residual cylon patterns she might need to work through. This reification of sexual reproduction, persistent throughout the main text as well as carrying overtly homophobic undertones in the extratextual webisodes, is one of a set of symptoms haunting the narrative ("The Face of the Enemy" Webisode 1). Humanism fights back in this text, and in more ways than the obvious human-cylon war. Humanism gets quite a foothold in the end of the narrative. Resting on the essentializing force of (hetero)sexual reproduction and the comforting presence of capitalist and thinly veiled Christian ideologies, *BSG* fails to offer an across-the-board revisioning of posthuman potential.

The problematic reification of sexual reproduction and the attendant traces of humanism do not erase the posthuman turn, however. Athena's ability to integrate her psychic remainder—her cylon essence—is crucial to a hybrid identity. That is, she does not completely reject her cylon-ness; rather, she accepts it for what it is and yet insists on her right to choose a different path of subjectivization. She ultimately answers neither to Cavil—the "evil" patriarch—nor to Adama—the "benign" patriarch—because she willingly disobeys orders from both in the service of her own personal choice. While she wears the uniform of the Colonial Fleet and usually follows orders, she is willing to cross lines when it comes to saving her daughter, particularly once she learns that Adama was party to deceiving Helo and Athena regarding Hera's supposed death ("Rapture" 3.12). To save Hera, held captive on the cylon base ship, Athena takes advantage of the cylon ability to die and resurrect into a new body. Brian Willems argues that the ability to know one's death, thereby experiencing the Heideggerian totality, makes cylons more human than humans. That is, the height of a Heideggerian humanity is reached by joining in the totality of death and then leaving this totality for the individualized life again (Willems 87-90). In this

way, Athena embraces a sort of posthumanity by utilizing, even exploiting, her cylon essence. Indeed, cylon death is as shrouded in mystique as human death. Earlier in the narrative, the Three model, D'Anna, exploits the cylon ability to resurrect in order to explore the realm between life and death, arguing that "this is [her] destiny, to see what lies between life and death" ("Rapture" 3.12). D'Anna's repeated suicides and her search for the revelation of the Final Five leads Cavil and the other models to vote to "box" the Three Model. The cylons, that is, are forbidden from searching for answers, particularly with regard to cylon spirituality. Athena's exploitation of this inherently cylon trait is a reflection of her will to hybridity. She will not reject her constructed essence entirely (particularly when doing so would not suit her personal agenda); rather, she will use any and all means to ensure her survival and the survival of those she loves, particularly her daughter. Athena's greatest strength, and the reason she leaves her profound genetic legacy—is that she embraces the cylon *and* the human parts of her being and, from both, she makes something new.

### *Macronarrative*

The telos of the narrative of *BSG* is the origin of our very own narrative. The Eight model is the mother of the mother of us all. Her genetic material, by this account, is spread throughout the species. Despite the turn to a very humanist reification of sexual reproduction, Athena's narrative trajectory suggests more than an entrenched humanist position. If not for the Eight's stretching beyond her programming to incorporate productively her psychic remainder and her resulting ability to individuate as neither wholly cylon nor wholly human, then the cycle of human-cylon war would likely continue. Neither human nor cylon can survive the cycle, but the optimistic ending suggests that a hybrid human-cylon ontology is the key to breaking the cycle and changing the story. To put it another way, the binary extremes are both rejected in favor of a

third space, a space where revisions might yet be made. The Eight model plays a crucial role in catalyzing that shift. She is the other that we always already had inside of us. She is *our* cylon remainder.

*BSG*'s profoundly ambivalent posthuman turn leaves some scholars cold, convinced that while there are some promising progressive ideas, ultimately the story upholds the hegemonic and patriarchal narratives of capitalism, religion, and heterosexism (Seidl). These accusations are fair, and they do limit *BSG*'s political potential. Where Ron Moore fails, however, Whedon succeeds. Indeed, in an interview with NPR before the premiere of *Dollhouse*, Whedon admits that he worries about the reception of the show because at first pass it does not look feminist at all. He points out, however, that "the point is you have to take control away from her so that she can get it back" ("Welcome" par. 11). The progressive feminist agenda, that is, surfaces only after the series explores and exposes the oppressive patriarchal framework in play. I turn now to *Dollhouse*, again focusing on both the process of becoming a subject on an individual level (Echo) and the unfolding of a larger narrative.

### *Dollhouse*

Joss Whedon, a celebrated favorite in contemporary cult film and TV, consistently refers to himself as one of *BSG*'s biggest fans, saying that *BSG* "may be the best show ever" (Commentary, "Vows" 2.1). Indeed, in the commentary to the first episode of Season Two of *Dollhouse*, Whedon makes at least three references to *BSG*, in large part because this episode features Jamie Bamber, who played Apollo in *BSG*, as the villain of the episode. Of course, another *BSG* alumnus (Tamoh Pinikett, or Helo on *BSG*) portrays "leading man" Paul Ballard on *Dollhouse*. While the two texts do not share a storyworld or narrative connections, the recurrence of actors, who always bring the baggage of their previous roles (for good or for ill), itself acts as a bridge be-

tween the narratives. In that same commentary, when Bamber and Penikett share the screen for the first time, Whedon quips, “The subtext here is why does Helo have a bigger part than Apollo in this show? And that’s something we deal with a lot ‘cause that’s obviously what the audience is asking themselves” (Commentary “Vows” 2.1). I linger on this point because I believe we should not ignore the intertextual elements here. In some ways, Whedon revises some of the philosophical aspects of *BSG*, using similar philosophical questions in grounding the show to move his narrative into a more progressive direction.

*Dollhouse* explores the question of what might happen if humanity had the technology to overwrite the human brain with the personalities of others. At first, the narrative merely explores one form of the exploitation that would undoubtedly take place. Advancements in technology, guided by the ever-increasing power of global capitalism, would result in the powerful and wealthy few exploiting the masses. Rossum,<sup>30</sup> a corporation spearheading technological advancement, opens several “dollhouses,” or high tech brothels. People “volunteer” to give up five years of their lives to be a doll.<sup>31</sup> Servicing clients in a variety of capacities, the dolls become active when imprinted with a particular personality and sent on their “engagement” with the client. They will remember nothing of their engagements, nor of their time in the dollhouse, and they will receive substantial financial benefits from their time as dolls. Of course, these are not promises that Rossum can (or intends to) keep. Ultimately Rossum uses the technology to “remote-wipe,” that is, to use a mass-message telephone call that erases the listener’s own personality and

---

<sup>30</sup> The name of the corporation alludes to Karel Čapek’s 1920 play, *R.U.R.*, which stands for Rossum’s Universal Robots. Indeed, *R.U.R.* introduced the word “robot” to the English language, despite the fact that the robots in the play are more akin to androids or clones than they are to our contemporary understanding of robots. For more on the connections between *R.U.R.* and *Dollhouse*, see Kristin Noone’s “Rossum’s Universal Robots: Karel Čapek, meets Joss Whedon in the Dollhouse” and K. Dale Koontz’s “Czech Mate: Whedon, Čapek, and the Foundations of the Dollhouse.”

<sup>31</sup> The narrative ultimately reveals that while some people do volunteer from sheer desperation, others are forced, like Echo, into choosing this exploitative prison over a possibly worse fate.

replaces it with the blank slate of a “doll” or the agenda of Rossum wrapped in a custom-personality. But *Dollhouse* is more than a simple cautionary tale about the unchecked power of technology. Echo begins her journey as one of the exploited, a doll, to be overwritten time and again in order to fill the needs of a powerful and wealthy elite; but something happens to her along the way. She becomes able to use the technology subversively and to create a posthuman subjectivity that is both at odds with, and in debt to, the technological tampering that at first rendered her powerless. Moreover, she accomplishes this by accepting narrative agency; yet that narrative agency can only emerge after a prolonged period of intense second-order observation. In other words, Echo reaches a point in her subjectivization wherein she can observe her many potential selves engaging in their surroundings. With time, she is able to access these selves at will. Observation becomes participation, but with a deeper awareness. A deeper epistemological engagement slowly emerges from the shift in ontological status.

To get at the polysemic layers in this text, we might look at Echo’s subjectivization process as a metaphor for both the multi-authored subject and the subjects of the TV generation. That is, Echo stands as a metonym of each of these subject positions, which are so interrelated that one would be impossible without the other. Invited time and again to watch stories unfold and to place ourselves within those stories imaginatively, we have a database of sorts—a repository of potential selves made possible by the inundation of technologically mediated narrative. Just as Whedon points to the narratives before *Dollhouse* to provide commentary on his own narrative by way of references to other popular culture texts (*BSG* and *The Step Father* to name just two), we resort to stories to build our selves. Our story comes to be through the mediation of other stories. We are comprised of interlocking and sometimes competing narratives. Whedon offers more evidence of this reliance on story in, once more, the commentary to “Vows”:

We are all constantly in the process of . . . not just directing the people around us, but in a way creating them. We are, after all, only the sum of our own experiences and the people in our lives are in our lives in a way that we kind of dictate. . . If they reject us, they're part of our tragedy. If they elevate us, they're part of our victory. . . We are building them in our own story.

Whedon explicitly acknowledges here that he views the self as inextricable from story—indeed, saturated with story(ies). By this logic, we lead our lives as a narrative thread, ever under revision. The ideas we explore through Echo's subjectivization process, therefore, are themselves echoes of what is already there in our own brains. No, the technology of *Dollhouse* itself does not exist, but we are all, as Wilcox argues, in the dollhouse. We are all programmed, constructed, flawed.

### *The Micronarratives of Dollhouse*

Narratives often hinge on epiphanies. A protagonist's development might begin or at least take a crucial turn at a single epiphanic moment. Echo does not have a single epiphanic moment. Or rather, she has several epiphanic moments, each one singular. The difference is in the repetition, not just *with* a difference, but *as* a difference. In each of these epiphanic moments, Echo proves that she is not interested in any version of a patriarchal, hegemonic, or normative narrative (fantasy) of the world. That is a story she simply will not be a part of. Some of the imprints within her—identities, not subjects—might be comfortable living in such a story world, a world wherein she fulfills the fantasies of others. Echo—a subject, not just an identity—refuses this narrative placement.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, she does more than refuse the narrative place-

---

<sup>32</sup> Adequately defining the difference between an identity and a subject deserves an extended treatment, but for the purposes of this discussion, the critical difference lies in agency and will. That is, Echo is certainly caught within structures of power, but she has a measure of agency regarding how she handles her placement as a self within these structures. The separate personalities used to create Echo have neither wills nor agencies of their own.

ment; she changes the narrative itself. I argue that Echo's subjectivization process—posthuman in its essence (or, rather, its lack of essence)—is wrapped up in narrative considerations.

Further, I argue that the process of posthuman subjectivization, rooted in narrative and involving both being and knowing, constitutes an ongoing feedback loop involving several discrete elements. As I outlined in chapters one and two, first there must be an ontological awareness—a moment (or moments) of epiphany in which one's place in the story (world) becomes clear. After the initial ontological awareness, an epistemological impulse initiates a drive to know and to act with at least a measure of agency in the story (world). This epistemological impulse creates the opportunity for one's self-story to interact with the larger narrative in which that self story is placed. One way this can evolve, as we have seen in chapter two, results in a director ontology. But somewhat beyond, or perhaps simply alongside, that variation, is the narrative agent ontology. Finally, a revised ontological awareness grows out of the interaction between the self-story and the larger narrative, a revised awareness that enables the changing of the narrative—not just the narrative of the self, but also the larger narrative in which that self is placed. Echo exemplifies a posthuman narrative onto-epistemology because her subjectivization process, enacted in, through, and by narrative, involves changing the story after finding her place within it. Echo has a multiplicity of roles: that much is commonplace, but what gives her a posthuman quality is the fact that she has roles on multiple levels of narrative. As hero of the story (if the story can be said to have a hero), Echo learns to situate and resituate herself within this larger narrative frame precisely by drawing on her experiences as other subjects, or, more accurately, identity constructs. She changes the larger narrative by becoming an effective reader, writer, and editor of the small stories.

Georgakapoulou's notion of small stories, discussed in chapter one, helps to parse out the levels of narrative here. Recent TV narrative, and certainly TV narrative by Whedon, operates on multiple narrative levels. The overarching narrative, often called the story arc, encompasses an entire series, usually punctuated by slightly smaller seasonal story arcs. In addition to that, each episode (or sometimes a series of two or three episodes) tells a still smaller story, one that might connect to the larger story arc but is also ultimately independent in terms of its resolution. The connectedness of these small stories to the larger narrative is amplified in *Dollhouse* because each narrative identity is added to the complex equation that is Echo's identity. A close look at some of the small stories here proves helpful in detailing some key moments in her ongoing subjectivization.

Again, I turn to our established discussion of subjectivization. Just as the Eight model accepts her radical constructedness as merely the beginning of her subjectivity rather than its essential core, Echo, too, accepts her radical constructedness as the foundation from which to build a posthuman self. The constructedness of their psyches resembles the constructedness of narratives. Or rather, it both resembles and engages with the constructedness of narratives.

My goal here is to tease out some of the interconnections between the posthuman psyche and the nature of narrative as it is exemplified in *Dollhouse*, particularly by looking at these elements as systems within and among other systems.

#### *Narrative and Metanarrative*

Looking at the composition processes and the layers of narrative of Whedon's texts is nothing new to Whedon scholars. J. Douglas Rabb and J. Michael Richardson's "Myth, Metaphor, Morality and Monsters: The Espenson Factor and Cognitive Science in Joss Whedon's Love Ethic" addresses the fact that Jane Espenson's training in cognitive science, particularly her



contribution to theories surrounding the metaphor, contributes to the narrative text and the narrative ethic (par 29).<sup>33</sup> In her article, “Let it Simmer,” Rhonda Wilcox closely examines Espenson’s drafts of “Pangs” in order to come to a deeper understanding of the episode and its metaphorical and political resonances (“Let it Simmer”). Janet K. Halfyard turns to the importance of music as a part of the creation of narrative in much of her work. In “Love, Death, Curses and Reverses (in F Minor): Music, Gender, and Identity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*,” Halfyard argues that the music performs important writerly functions, particularly in the creation of character identities. Finally, Katrina Blasinghame, David Kociemba, Rebecca Williams, Judith Tabron, and Mark Peters have all written articles for *Slayage* dealing with fan communities and their contributions to the larger Buffy mythos. These examples highlight the much needed turning of critical attention toward the different voices in the creation of the narrative. My argument diverges from these in its focus on the collaborative nature of the writing of television narrative as a crucial aspect of the narrative itself, an aspect that is reflected in the narrative text. Despite the fact that many episodes are credited to one individual, the narrative development of an entire series, and even of specific episodes of a series, relies on a number of writers at varying stages of the process. This observation seems crucial to an analysis of television writing, which is, by virtue of the conditions of production, collaborative. There may be a central figure (Whedon, Abrams, Bochco, etc.) given most of the credit, but the key to television narrative’s success is the collaborative nature of storytelling. David Kociemba argues in his article “‘Over-identify Much?’: Passion, ‘Passion,’ and the Author-Audience Feedback Loop in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*” that the serial narrative form, particularly in the digital age, allows for a feedback loop be-

---

<sup>33</sup> Perhaps we should, in fact, be focusing more on Jane Espenson, who was deeply involved in multiple functions with the production of both *BSG* and *Dollhouse*. For more on episode, see David Kociemba’s chapter, “Understanding the Espensode,” in the book *Buffy Goes Dark*, by Edwards, Rambo, and South.

tween authors, audience, and the text itself. He further argues that authorial agency resides not merely in the credited authors but also in the actors and in the audience members (pars. 1-3).

The story, then, becomes a multi-authored text, just as Echo, herself, is a multi-authored text.

I in no way mean to suggest that we try to parse out individual voices as a methodology. That is beside the point. It is the conversation that matters here—the content of the conversation, yes, but more importantly, the fact of it. I argue that an awareness of the changes that have taken place within the narrative systems that most capture and represent society to itself is necessary to developing a deep understanding of the narratives themselves. It is not just that the play's the thing, but rather that the *creation* of the play's the thing. To that end, we have to look at the narrative process as well as the narrative product, which we might, following Arwen Spicer, alternatively call the metanarrative and the narrative (par. 1).

Spicer addresses this interplay between the metanarrative and the narrative itself in her article, "'It's Bloody Brilliant!': The Undermining of Metanarrative Feminism in the Season Seven Arc Narrative of *Buffy*."<sup>34</sup> Spicer argues that the feminist metanarrative, couched in terms of taking back the agency of the slayer story, is ultimately self-undermining because it merely reinscribes a hierarchical pattern of authority. The overtly political metanarrative goal, Spicer argues, overrides the narrative means, which themselves fall short of that goal. That is, the goal of shared slayer power—a clearly feminist politics—becomes so important to reach that the means of reaching it fall short of a feminist, dialogic ideal (pars. 1-3). Spicer is pointing to the failure of the two layers of narrative to harmonize. My objective is quite the opposite. I wish to show how these layers echo each other. I will show how narrative and subjectivization work together at the level of the narrative proper and then turn to the traces we might find in the narrative

---

<sup>34</sup> To eliminate confusion of terms, I should note that Spicer specifically refers to the entire text of the series as the "narrative" and she calls the ideological frameworks that guide that narrative the "metanarrative."

process that tie into the phenomenon of posthuman subjectivization. In other words, we can see this effect on the level of the micronarrative (Echo's story), the level of the narrative (the story of the end of the World through Rossum's abuse of technology), and the level of the metanarrative (the conditions of possibility for the text, the paratextual levels, and the viewers themselves).

*Narrative onto-epistemology in Echo*

To situate Echo's subjectivization process, and its reflection of the process by which it was created, it will be helpful to turn for a moment to Buffy's trajectory. J. Douglas Rabb and J. Michael Richardson argue that Whedon's narratives often revolve around existential choices, particularly choices that his heroes must make for which they have no authority. Rabb and Richardson argue that "moral choice can best be explained through narrative" and "is usually grounded in metaphorical thought based on, proceeding from, prototypes rather than in absolute ethical principles or abstract universal moral rules" (par. 10). The choices that the characters make are made possible by the conditions of the narrative itself: the events leading up to the moment of choice, the "nature" of the character, etc. These choices, in turn, affect the way the narrative unfolds. I argue that they do more than that, however. In Whedon's texts, the choices the characters make often involve changing the very terms of the narrative. For example, Buffy is the chosen one, The Slayer. That identity and subject position define who she is. But then she changes the terms. When Buffy's friend Willow uses magic to turn all the potentials into full-fledged Slayers,<sup>35</sup> the terms of the narrative have changed, and this crucial change, in turn, radi-

---

<sup>35</sup> In the series finale of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Buffy and the gang fight their scariest Big Bad yet, and Buffy decides that the only way to win this war is to use the mystical powers of a weapon forged by a group of powerful (and magical) women from ancient times to imbue with Slayer powers all the girls who are currently marked as in line for being a Slayer. In other words, no longer unaware of their potential as superheroes, all of these potential Slayers attain their powers, giving Buffy and company the edge to win the fight. This overtly feminist plot point is later problematized in the comic book continuation of the story, in which the gang must deal with the consequences of such an all-encompassing magical spell that so fundamentally alters the mystical balance of power in the universe.

cally alters Buffy's own identity. Now she is not the only slayer. She shares the power—and the responsibility—with hundreds of others.

The subjectivization process has much to do with power, particularly in the Foucauldian model. Becoming as a subject is about learning one's configuration within power structures. In her article “‘It's About Power': Buffy, Foucault, and the Quest for the Self,” Julie Sloan Brannon argues that Buffy's coming to be as a subject echoes the Foucauldian model of subjectivization within discourses and structures of power. The hero's quest is, for Buffy, to find her self. In changing the world, changing the story and the power dynamics, Buffy finds not just her calling, but her self. A similar trajectory unfolds for Echo. Prior to Rossum's tampering with her brain, Echo was Caroline Farrell, but, like the other dolls, Echo does not have access to the personality that was originally hers. Echo must come to be as a subject—and a posthuman one at that—by slowly accessing the fragments of Caroline's story, and she does this largely by accessing these fragments externally. That is, she does not integrate Caroline into her psyche until very late in the narrative. Until then, she must piece the story together as though Caroline is and always was someone else. Caroline herself, locked away on a “wedge,” the storage device on which different personalities reside, constitutes Echo's psychic remainder, and it is only through the reintegration of this psychic remainder that the self story can be complete.

Echo, like Buffy, is chosen. Echo is chosen because of a microbiological difference in her blood (well, Caroline's blood) that allows her to integrate and eventually direct her various imprints. Rossum, constantly (and illegally) monitoring medical records, finds Caroline's difference, and Boyd<sup>36</sup> plans to use her as the next step in evolution. Caroline is special, chosen by the

---

<sup>36</sup> Throughout most of the series, the audience believes that Boyd is the moral center of the show rather than, as it ultimately turns out, the very catalyst for the “thoughtpocalypse.”

patriarchy, a trope Whedon already developed extensively in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.<sup>37</sup> But the most crucial aspect here is the fact that the patriarchal chosen-ness rests on the narrative's being controlled by that patriarchy. When Echo, like Buffy before her, changes the story itself, she effectively changes her own role both in the story and in relation to the story. The crucial difference between Buffy's chosen-ness and Echo's lies at the point in the unfolding of the narrative in which they each (and by extension, we as viewers) learn that information. We know from the start that Buffy is chosen, but viewers do not know that Echo is chosen until near the end of the series. The withholding of information not just from the viewers, but also from Echo herself, changes the way she integrates this crucial knowledge into her self story as well as the part this knowledge plays in her story. In her essay, "Not (Yet) Knowing: Epistemological Effects of Deferred and Suppressed Information in Narrative," Emma Kafalenos reminds us that

[r]eaders construct fabulas as they read. Each version of fabula that readers construct during the process of reading is a configuration. Readers interpret events as they are revealed in relation to the configuration they have assembled at that stage in their reading. As the fabula one creates grows and extends, the configuration in relation to which one interprets events expands. Interpretations shift as one reads *because* the configuration changes. (52)

Buffy's chosen-ness is something that defines her fabula-construction and the part she plays within it. Echo's is, by contrast, lurking in the margins as a question, a possibility perhaps sensed, but certainly less involved in shaping Echo's becoming. Her biological essence is a fac-

---

<sup>37</sup> In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Buffy is one in a long line of young girls chosen by an ancient patriarchal magic to stand between humanity and the forces of darkness. Buffy finds that she has not only to fight vampires and demons but indeed the patriarchal structures still in place. Buffy breaks away from the Watcher's Council, the modern incarnation of the patriarchal structure, and ends up forming her own, more feminist approach to fighting the evils of the world.

tor, but it is not given the privileged position; the essence, like Buffy's stake, is not the power. Echo chooses an acceptance of radical constructedness over essence, and it is this constructedness (and, indeed, the acceptance of it) that signifies the power.

Throughout Season One, Echo proves herself to be a bit different, special. She seems more self-aware than the other dolls when in her doll status, supposedly a blank slate, and she is in great demand as an Active. Her engagements throughout Season One reflect the patriarchal culture of greed and objectification of women. Echo's participation in these largely male fantasies occasionally challenges the fantasy, but she is not yet ready to take narrative agency. It is not until "Omega," the penultimate episode of Season One, however, that we see her subjectivize as a fully aware person capable of accessing, or at this stage, perhaps just hearing, the variety of personalities in her head. Echo is not the first doll to become aware of the many people who comprise her. Alpha, the renegade, evolved doll who escaped the dollhouse prior to the viewer's arrival in the narrative, experienced this same phenomenon in his "composite event," an "unfortunate technological anomaly" in which Alpha gained access to multiple personalities, including personalities that had been wiped from his brain ("Briar Rose" 1.11). Alpha's subjectivization is demonized—at least at this point. He is unable to integrate his personalities successfully and smoothly, so he becomes a jumble of different personalities access to which he cannot completely control, resulting in the formation of a psychopathic genius. His fantasy of being the first *Übermensch* results in his plan to make his very own *UberEve*, and Echo is his choice. He sees that she is special as well and returns to the dollhouse to help her ascend as he has ascended. But he underestimates her connection to humanity. The scene in which Alpha attempts to meet his Omega is a crucial one for Echo's subjectivization, despite the fact that after being wiped from this experience and returned to Doll status, she will have to come to awareness repeatedly before

she is consistently “awake.” Alpha arranges for Caroline to be imprinted into the body of Wendy, an unfortunate casualty of Alpha’s spree. He wants to create Echo’s composite event so that the first thing she confronts when she becomes aware is her own human past, her traumatic kernel. He plans for Echo to renounce her humanity and embrace her posthumanity by killing Caroline, but she comes to an understanding of this evolution that is fundamentally different from Alpha’s understanding. Rising from the chair, she says, “I get it. Now I understand everything” (“Omega” 1.12). She explains the composite experience like this: “I can slip into one. Actually, it slips into me. They had to make room for it. They hollowed me out. There is no me. I’m just a container” (“Omega”). Refusing to play the role in the story that Alpha has written for her, she shows a glimmer of the rebellious spirit that will always refuse the narrative placement in which whatever powers that be attempt to contain her. After the fight with Alpha, Echo says to Caroline, “I’m just the porch light. Waiting for you” (“Omega”). Here, upon first becoming Echo and confronted with her traumatic kernel, she thinks that Caroline is who she wants to be again. By the end of the series-narrative, this is no longer the case, and her journey to this change of heart begins in earnest in Season Two.

In Season One, Echo plays out multiple patriarchal narratives, and through this repetition of patterns and her ultimate ascension, so to speak, to a critical awareness of those narratives, she begins to find ways to deconstruct them. In Season Two, Echo begins to subjectivize regularly and repeatedly, while her individual imprints are themselves subverting normative fantasies. In the first episode of season two, “Vows,” Echo is imprinted as an FBI agent who is working undercover as the fiancée of an arms dealer, Martin Klar (portrayed by Jamie Bamber), but Klar is not the client. We learn that the arrangement Paul Ballard and Rossum reached at the end of Season One includes Paul’s using Echo to bring down the people he was unable to catch during

his time in the FBI. For this extended engagement, Paul has Echo imprinted with an FBI agent, his partner. The pretense of the “engagement” is thus doubled. A clear subversion of patriarchal narratives begins here, as the next few engagements deconstruct normative narratives of marriage and motherhood. Further, Echo seems at first to have been successfully wiped from the composite event she experienced in Alpha’s chair. We soon learn, however, that the traces of the imprints linger with her. Eventually, she is able to access every imprint she has ever had at will, but at this point, while she can see the people she becomes, she cannot yet engage as those people while simultaneously critically examining her actions and recognizing them as programmed, constructed actions. Each time she gains this ability, usually triggered by a fight or intense emotions, she becomes more practiced at this simultaneous engagement and reflection. She thereby gains a posthuman perspective. As she gains this critical perspective, she also begins to tear down oppressive, patriarchal narratives.

When the viewer enters the story in the first episode of Season Two, Echo and Klar are about to get married. The opening words to the episode are “Big day,” signifying the cultural importance placed on marriage, particularly for the prospective bride. Boyd’s reaction to this engagement expresses, as his reactions usually do, the way it seems that viewers (should) feel: “This one’s really sick” (“Vows” 2.1). The engagement, and Boyd’s reaction to it, can mean polyvalently here. That is, the engagement is “sick” on several levels, some of them ideologically contradictory. Boyd’s remark might, then, mean that flaunting the sacredness of marriage is sick, or conversely that making Echo go through the trauma of marrying this clearly violent man is sick. Or, perhaps, even the pretense of fulfilling the patriarchal narratives that still persist is what makes this engagement particularly repellant to Boyd, and arguably to viewers as well. While all of these are possibilities supported by the text, and are indeed all valid interpretations,



it is the third option that I want to explore. After the wedding and, most importantly, the wedding night, Adelle orders a thorough physical examination. During the course of the examination, Dr. Saunders and Topher utterly objectify and mechanize Echo, referring to her “wiring” and “plumbing.” The experience of the physical examination, while ostensibly performed as always, catalyzes moments of subjectivization. As Dr. Saunders performs a pelvic examination, Echo has a memory of Dr. Saunders when she was a doll, Whiskey, a memory in which the two were lovers. This pleasant memory (Echo clearly enjoys the memory) of a sexual relationship with a woman undermines the patriarchal narrative at work here. Echo’s doll status, as we have seen, has become self-aware, and the bodily memory triggered by an intimate, if clinical, experience with Dr. Saunders/Whiskey induces pleasurable feelings in Echo. This homoerotic moment puts into relief the constructed nature of marriage. Echo is engaged in tearing down, while pretending to uphold, a “sacred” patriarchal narrative, and she is tasked to do so by Paul. Even as she does these things, she is remembering, and feeling, alternative spaces her body formerly inhabited.

Echo’s ruse, predictably, fails when Klar sees a surveillance picture of Echo with Paul. Klar assaults her, and the blow to her head catalyzes another moment of subjectivization. She responds as the wrong imprint, pauses, and says, “Who did they make me this time?” Paul, ever willing to engage his rescue fantasy with Echo,<sup>38</sup> thwarts Klar’s attempt to kill Echo. Paul’s plan includes assaulting Echo, hitting her repeatedly in an attempt to knock into her the memory of the imprint loaded with martial arts abilities. This strategy works, but it also brings to the fore

---

<sup>38</sup> Paul obsessively chased the sparse evidence he had on Caroline and rumors of the Dollhouse throughout Season One. His obsession fixated specifically on saving Caroline, and while he goes out of his way to save another Doll with whom he had a sexual history, it is Caroline/Echo who drives him. Paul, as programmed as any Doll (even before he became one), maps his life out via this narrative primarily, and it his unwillingness to explore the posthuman potential of his eventual status as a doll, neurologically. It takes literally dying in body to bring him to this plane. Echo installs his memories and personality into her brain so that they can still be together.

the ever-present subtext of this show—the problematic of the sexual marketplace. Paul’s struggle with Klar is both to win an old war and to win the girl. Neither Paul nor Klar can have the girl, though, because she always ends up saving herself. Paul, that is, only pushed Echo into the “right” imprint; Echo did the rest.

At the end of the episode, Echo reveals to Paul and the viewers that she is “awake.” She says, “I remember everything. Sometimes I’m someone else, and then I come back, but I still feel them. All of them. I’ve been many people. I can hear them, sometimes suddenly. I’m all of them, but none of them is me” (“Vows” 2.1). She has started to become her own person. No longer confined to human potential, Echo has a being so polyvalent, so varied and constructed, that she is able to become something other than, something more than human. At this point, however, she is still almost infantile in her subjectivity. She ends this monologue with a genuine question for Paul, and by extension, the viewers: “Do you know who’s real?” (“Vows 2.1). Paul has no good answer for her, but by the end of the series we know that, for Echo, the answer is “all of them.” We are all constructed, as Boyd compellingly argues to Dr. Saunders in this episode. Echo is just more willing to accept her radical constructedness. It is precisely this willingness, the same willingness that Athena and eventually even Boomer show, that drives the post-human subjectivization process.

The second episode of the season, “Instinct,” addresses the narrative of motherhood. Imprinted with the personality of a new mother, including a glandular tweak that enables lactation, Echo is hired to bond with an infant whose mother died in childbirth and whose father finds himself unable to do so. Echo’s maternal instinct soon kicks into overdrive, however, and she becomes paranoid that her “husband” is having an affair and then that he is trying to kill both her and the baby. After returning to the Dollhouse and having a standard “wipe” that returns her to

Doll status, to Echo, the maternal drive is still intact, and she escapes the dollhouse, kidnaps the child, and confronts the husband. After the man explains to Echo the situation, she has another moment of subjectivization, remembering who she is, and more importantly, who she is not.

That is, despite the bodily cues telling her she is the baby's mother, she now remembers that she is not. One reading of this episode is that the maternal instinct is so strong, so "pure," as Topher puts it, that tampering with it is immoral and, again Topher's words, "a bridge too far" ("Instinct 2.2). A more subversive reading, however, is that Echo, as a posthuman subject, rejects a normative maternal path in favor of what we might call a post-maternal one. That is, her body might be programmed to protect the child at all costs, but she can now override that programming.

When Echo finally overrides the maternal instinct her body is producing, she is able to feel the feelings, but from a step back, from a point of observation. She expresses this perspective to Paul after he tells her he knows that she can remember her other imprints. Her response is telling: "Not remember. Feel. I was married. I felt love, and pain, fear. It was not pretend for me" ("Instinct" 2.2). She clearly *feels* as each individual imprint, and the feeling is stronger, at first, than any cognition she has. But this situation will change shortly, because she is beginning to be able to separate the experience from the reflection on the experience. She continues, "I'm awake now. I don't want to go back to sleep" ("Instinct" 2.2). Her doll status, at this point, is self-aware, and she can reflect on her engagements from within this space. She is not yet able to inhabit both spaces simultaneously, though, and her becoming able to do so is the process of post-human subjectivization, for it unites the stories she observes with the story she makes for herself. In other words, as participating observer, she gains narrative agency.

After deconstructing several oppressive, patriarchal narratives, Echo turns her attention to the confrontation with the greed-driven capitalist narrative. To defeat Rossum and change the

narrative, she must first enter the Attic, a complex network of intersecting narratives out of which it is ostensibly impossible to break, and then she must finally face her traumatic kernel by allowing her body's original imprint, Caroline, to be integrated back into her brain. The Attic is a nightmare landscape of horrors fueled by the adrenaline produced by human brains under prolonged fear. This network composed of human brains (belonging to people who have proven to be a problem, in one way or another, for Rossum's overarching agenda) acts as a powerful processor—powerful enough to compose Rossum's mainframe. Each brain in the Attic is caught in a loop of nightmares based on that person's individual fears. Each person, then, is contained within and driven by a story of her own creation that she is powerless to change. Echo, perhaps by now predictably, can change the story—her own and the stories of others. Among the people imprisoned in the Attic are Dominic, the former head of security, imprisoned for his attempts to challenge Rossum from within, and Clyde Ranolph, Boyd's original partner and co-founder of Rossum, as well as the first person to be imprisoned in the Attic. Indeed, Clyde is astonished to see that both Dominic and Echo are self-aware, as heretofore he has been, to his knowledge, the only self-aware brain in the Attic. Despite Clyde's extended period of time in the Attic, even he is powerless to change the story scenarios that define his immediate surroundings.

At this point, Echo becomes an entity of her own, insisting that her "real name's Echo" ("The Attic" 2.10). Thoroughly accepting the radical constructedness of her "essence," she no longer views herself as the porch light waiting for Caroline's return. She has dozens of imprints in her brain, but she seems completely devoid of Caroline. Echo, ever the hero, figures out that to change the story in the Attic, she has to get out of it and then help the others do the same. To do this, she must die in the Attic and "resurrect" once she flat lines in the physical world. Changing

the story in the Attic entails exiting it, and the pieces of the overarching story Echo learned while in the Attic give her what she needs to change the story outside of the Attic as well.

In fact, in order to put the pieces of the larger narrative in place, she must access Caroline because Caroline alone knows the identity of the founder and leader of Rossum. However, when Caroline's wedge is missing, she tells Adelle that while she did not take it, she is glad that it was not there. She is frightened by what the reintegration of her original identity will do to her new one. Even Topher, the scientist responsible for "creating" the personalities that get imprinted in the dolls, is wary of what might happen after reintegrating the original, essential, personality into Echo's constructed psyche ("Getting Closer" 2.11). Echo's traumatic kernel, represented by Caroline, has the power to threaten Echo's existence as a coherent subject. While Echo has been aware of Caroline's existence for some time, she has not yet been imprinted with this original personality. Likewise, the viewers have, at this point, seen only snippets of a video and the conversation between Caroline and Adelle wherein Caroline "agrees" to enter the Dollhouse. This parity of knowledge between the viewers and Echo serves to create identification with Echo. We want what she wants, which is for Echo to continue to inhabit Caroline's body, with or without the addition of Caroline. We have very little reason to care about Caroline, but Echo is the protagonist. Caroline, in other words, now the trace, the remainder, is an optional component. Further, contrary to Paul's original notion that Caroline was an innocent victim, we learn that she was actually a terrorist trying to take down Rossum because of evidence suggesting inhuman practices. Caroline's attempts to destroy Rossum Headquarters result in Caroline's incarceration in the Dollhouse. Before becoming a doll for the first time, however, she meets the co-founder of Rossum, Boyd Langton, heretofore Echo's handler and then the chief of security at the Los Angeles Dollhouse. The character who Whedon at one point called the "moral center of the show"

(Commentary, “Vows”), is in fact the villain, a turn of events that shifts the storyworld and the ontological positioning viewers have towards it. When Boyd is revealed to be the head of Rossum, we see the pain and sacrifice involved in fighting this (any?) system: Boyd was Echo’s Handler, and he had an unmistakably paternal role in her story (Wilcox, “Echoes” par 12). Now, at the climax of her story, she must kill the Father and attempt to pay for his sins. Caroline’s original mission, revised but at last complete, to blow up Rossum Headquarters and overthrow its power structure, seems to point to a victory, but the world of *Epitaph* suggests that such a hopeful reading is naïve.

Echo’s acceptance of death in the Attic as a way to reenter the main narrative and then change the story from within enables her to take down Rossum in the final episode of Season Two. But the final episode of Season Two is not the end of the story. Here again, the conditions of the show’s coming to be matter a great deal, for yet another set of narrative levels are thereby introduced. For the duration of season One, the fate of the show hung in the balance while Fox decided whether to green-light a second season. In the event that Fox decided to cancel the series, they shot an episode entitled “Epitaph 1,” an episode that would offer closure to the series. Fox did renew it for a second season, however, so they never aired “Epitaph I,” though it is included on the DVD and Blu-Ray of Season One. In light of the renewal, then, the narrative in Season Two played itself toward, but not all the way to, the events in “Epitaph 1.” Then, at the end of Season Two, they aired “Epitaph 2,” which effectively wraps up (most of) the narrative threads.

The storyworld of “Epitaph,” set a decade in the future, is post-apocalyptic. Slowed, but not stopped, by Echo’s actions at the end of Season Two, Rossum continues developing mind-wiping and programming technologies, finally forcing Topher to invent a way to remote wipe a

mass of people. Topher's invention works remarkably well, and most of the people left, called "dumbshows," are essentially Dolls programmed to kill anyone without that same programming. A few Actuals survive, and there are also a few awake survivors, still fighting what is left of Rossum.

In "Epitaph 1," the way to Safe Haven is also accessible only through narrative. The major plot points needed to reconstruct the narrative, represented as fragments, are stored in the imprint chair. These fragments are downloaded via an earlier version of Caroline/Echo, the version that becomes embodied in a child, dubbed by Zone, a member of the group of survivors, as "Tiny Messiah" ("Epitaph 2" 2.13). Here, Echo is already reintegrated with Caroline, which, coupled with the fact that this version of Caroline/Echo is imprinted into a child, seems to give her an extra dose of posthuman mythos. She now knows the way to Safe Haven, and she has insight into Echo herself, who is clearly uncomfortable with the dynamic this doubling creates. The fact that this double of Caroline is a child is significant. Her interface with the world is necessarily limited by this child's body. She is not as tall or as strong as she is used to being; she has a little girl's voice. Zone and Mag's reactions to her are understandably colored by the body Caroline/Echo is wearing: "Look around, Tiny Messiah, it's over," Zone replies to Caroline's hopeful statement that "we are lost; we are not gone" ("Epitaph 2"). All of this serves to keep a humanist hero in play. What better representation than a walking reminder of that go-to humanist value, sexual reproduction? Once arriving at Neuropolis, Tiny Messiah expects to confront Echo. Mag asks her, "Is it gonna be weird to meet yourself? You know, face to your real face?" ("Epitaph 2"). We never hear her response to this question, as they are immediately attacked, but Tiny Messiah seems to take it all in stride. She seems impressed by Echo's plan, showing an approving smile. Meeting with one's double is certainly not a new trope (J.J. Abrams seems par-

ticularly fond of this trope, and it occurs in *Buffy* several times), but this doubling consists of two different drafts of the same narrative self as well as a doubling of the mind rather than the body.<sup>39</sup> After the rescue, Echo tells Paul what happened, adding, “I think one of them was me” (“Epitaph 2”). Echo seems slightly disturbed by the doubling, whereas Tiny Messiah seems amused by the opportunity to watch herself, embodied in Caroline, in action. Not only that, but Echo is a self further along her narrative path than is Tiny Messiah, for Echo has lived as Echo in the ensuing years between the end of the Season Two arc and “Epitaph 1,” whereas Tiny Messiah’s version of Echo is an earlier download, so to speak, revived after an undisclosed period of time. Tiny Messiah brings to the version of Echo she is imprinted with an innocence by virtue of her embodiment. That is, she cannot act on her desires (for Paul or for anyone) because she is stuck in a child’s body. She is therefore perfectly positioned to be a second-order observer. Perhaps the most literal and tangible example of the re-entry of the second-order observer we have seen thus far, Tiny Messiah carries tremendous pathos, a call to affect in a posthuman scenario.

Echo’s final step towards a posthuman subjectivization is her shedding of desire. Unlike Rossum executive who chases every indulgence, wearing out body after body, Echo finally transcends desires. Just before enacting the plan to “bring back the world,” Adelle says to Echo, “Funny that the last fantasy the dollhouse would fulfill would be yours.” Echo replies, “I don’t have any fantasies, Adelle” (“Epitaph 2”). Still reeling from Paul’s death, Echo perhaps feels at this point that without Paul, there is nothing left to desire. Finding Paul’s backup wedge, Echo effectively removes the desire that we as viewers know she does have for Paul by relocating that

---

<sup>39</sup> This trope is of course present in literature as well, but I purposefully pull examples from television, and relatively recent television at that. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, we see splitting or doubling of Xander (“The Replacement” 5.3), Willow (“The Wish” 3.9 and “Doppelgangland” 3.16), Buffy and Faith (“This Year’s Girl” 4.15 and “Who Are You” 4.16). J.J. Abrams deals with doubling in *Alias* (“Doppelganger” 1.5 and “Double Agent” 2.14, among others), and he does so extensively in *Fringe*, as almost everyone has a double in the alternate universe.



desire. No longer stuck in a humanist dyad of self and other, Echo queers her relationship with Paul by allowing deeper penetration than is possible for any human subject. Her posthuman subjectivization changes the terms of the story: it rearticulates the fulfillment of desire in such a way that she transcends her desires and the mortal and physical constraints of humanity by allowing Paul to be one of her selves. She adds to her multi-voiced psyche a posthuman queering of subject-object relations resulting in a multi-voiced, internalized fulfillment (theoretically) of desire.<sup>40</sup>

To show the crucial difference between a humanist version of a narrative onto-epistemology and a posthuman one, I draw from episode ten of Season One (“Haunted”), in which Adelle’s friend, Margaret, is resurrected from her wedge into Echo’s body. Margaret arranged this resurrection with Adelle so that she could go to her own funeral to see what people would say about her—to get, ostensibly, the truth (as long as the truth is good). But she ends up doing more than that. Convinced that she was murdered, Echo/Margaret’s mission is to solve the murder. To solve a murder, particularly in the detective genre, one must put the pieces of a story together such that it “all adds up.” Like Echo’s, then, Margaret’s self-fulfillment lies in finding out the story. Unlike Echo, however, Margaret cannot change the story itself. She gets to read the ending, a humanist fantasy fulfilled, to be sure, but while her connection with Adelle grants her a temporary and likely quite taunting taste of posthumanity, Margaret is thoroughly ensconced in the human. She must die again, this time by willingly being wiped. Indeed, as she is in the chair, waiting to be wiped (with no hope of resurrection), she asks Adelle if she will see

---

<sup>40</sup> This reading of Paul’s integration into Caroline’s psyche ignores the fact that if the show had continued under these conditions, there would undoubtedly be a host of problems resulting from this sidestepping of desire. For example, can a psychic integration that never allows for physical intimacy be satisfying, or would it be more frustrating than merely accepting Paul’s death? These are questions that cannot be answered with the narrative closure occurring where it does. Even so, her strategy, regardless of potential problems, reveals her creative ways of changing the story.

her life flash before her eyes. Adelle replies, “every single moment,” a clear echo of the visual representation of the fragmented self-stories that make up each doll in Active status.<sup>41</sup> Resigned to her death, Margaret reaches an acceptance of her ontological status, engaging in the epistemological impulse only to find closure. Echo, on the other hand, comes to see and, indeed, observe) her ontological status, her place within the intersecting discourses and structures of power, and her epistemological impulse follows a trajectory that results in changing the system, changing the narrative. Not satisfied with humanism, especially since she isn’t strictly speaking, a human anymore, Echo effectively hacks into the narrative that she was told was a read-only file.

Echo (with help from her friends, both external and internal) saved the world, and changed the story. She was part of the resistance to a force that inevitably and irrevocably changed the world, and she was a vital part of the entire process of writing the story of humanity. Topher brings back the world, albeit a badly scarred one, and returns Actuals to the “default setting.” This move hints at a humanist re-entrenchment, but the world he brings back is not the same world that got left behind after the “Thoughtpocalypse.” Many are dead; the material structures of power are in shambles, and the discursive structures of power have all been questioned and torn down. Even Topher admits just before his sacrificial restoration of the world that Adelle has the harder job, putting the world back together. In the middle of the devastation, however, is the glimmer of a posthuman potential, for Echo, having spent her entire existence fulfilling the polysemic metaphors of her name, becomes an echo of yet another kind, an echo of a posthuman evolution, a presence that, though residual, is now in the narrative system. It is a presence that has the power to change the story.

---

<sup>41</sup> The series uses this visual representation of one’s life flashing before one’s eyes when the dolls are wiped as well as in the opening credits of the show. This visual representation might productively also be applied to Helen’s “assembling in *Galatea* 2.2.

But her echo extends even further than that. Her status as a multi-authored subject, a clearly constructed being, echoes the multi-authored nature of the narrative itself as well as the nature of the TV viewer. Multiply authored, all of us, and multiply storied, we all, like Echo, must situate ourselves within the right story at the right time, and becoming a careful reader and writer of our own stories gives us agency within whatever larger narrative(s) we find ourselves placed. Whedon and company's posthumanism comes in the form of a fantasy (but a revised one) of authorial agency—a fantasy that exhibits a plurality at multiple narrative levels. Caught in the metanarrative as much as in the narrative, a part of the form just as it is a part of the content, the collaborative nature of storytelling—the social and cooperative efforts of a system to create meaningful narratives ultimately results in the self-aware changing of the terms of the story, and thereby her place within that story.

Both *BSG* and *Dollhouse* explicitly address posthumanism, asking their audiences to entertain the possibility of more intimate connections between the human brain and ever advancing technologies. Further, both texts exhibit clear revisionist tendencies, particularly with regard to earlier narratives. Finally, both texts reflect in their content the conditions of their creation. Both, that is, engage multiply authored texts as something that plays out importantly in ontological as well as epistemological frameworks and parameters. No longer merely observing, nor even observing and directing, we are now, these texts suggest, observing, directing, and participating with a goal toward changing the story. Caught within the narratives we consume, and increasingly by our own command, TV viewers watch themselves inscribed into, and at times reinscribing into themselves, the texts that they consume.

## CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I hope to have shown the evolution of the observer through its permutations as second-order observer, witness, director, and narrative agent and to have demonstrated the various interacting processes involved in the recursive feedback loops between and among, self, world, and story. I have argued that engaging with technologically mediated narrative in ever-increasing doses and in evolving access technologies, results in shifts on both the ontological and epistemological levels. Enacting second-order observation with regard to the stories we consume and produce results in a changed positionality towards both narrative and world. We can see this ontological shift through its epistemological ramifications, specifically narrative epistemological frameworks. That is, the observer expresses as witness, director, and finally, narrative agent; our positionality with regard to story changes as the delivery method changes, and as the relationship we develop with narrative as a guiding epistemology (and indeed, as I argue, a guiding ontology) deepens, we engage in our narratives with increasing agency and ever-under-revision subjectivity. A truly comprehensive examination of this would require a sweeping historical survey of narrative delivery and transmission, something that far exceeds the parameters of this dissertation. This kind of work can be taken up in a number of different ways. In other words, I view this dissertation as the beginning of a theoretical framework by which to engage contemporary narratives—both print and televisual. To illustrate this potential, I will briefly discuss three texts that are still in narrative production or have recently been completed/published. Each of these texts approach, from varying angles, some of the problems I open up in the body of this dissertation.

The posthumously published (in April 2011) and incomplete novel, *The Pale King*, by David Foster Wallace, traces, among other things, the experiences of one “David Foster Wal-

lace” during thirteen months of employment at the IRS. The author as character-narrator artifice is more overt than in either of the novels by Barth and Powers examined in chapter one. He addresses the artifice head on in the chapter, sixty pages into the book, entitled “Author’s Foreword”:

Author here. Meaning the real author, the living human holding the pencil, not some abstract narrative persona. Granted there sometimes is such a persona in *The Pale King*, but that’s mainly a pro forma statutory construct, and entity that exists just for legal and commercial purposes, rather like a corporation; it has no direct, provable connection to me as a person. But this right here is me as a real person, David Wallace, age forty[.]” (*TPK* 66)

This passage resonates with the echo of the opening passage of *Infinite Jest*, in which Hal insists, “I am in here,” (3) and it suggests a need for the writer to engage the narrative on a deeply personal level—the need to write oneself into existence. Wallace attempts to break out of the linguistic embodiment precisely by embodying it fully with directly expressed authorial intent. He manipulates metafiction to his own ends, using it to echo and repeat with a difference the work of his literary forbears. This engagement with the author as character artifice, and its move to a more embodied re-inscription than in the work of Barth, or even Powers, resonates in the metaphor he chooses to represent his writerly self—the pencil. Rather than wielding a pen, like Barth,<sup>42</sup> or composing at a typewriter, like DeLillo,<sup>43</sup> Wallace represents himself as the writer

---

<sup>42</sup> John Barth famously writes with a Parker 51 fountain pen, a pictorial representation of which graces the first edition of his 1994 novel, *Once Upon a Time*. Barth says, “I always write my first drafts in ink. The flow of ink on paper still pleases me” (qtd. in Rasmussen).

<sup>43</sup> In a 1982 interview with Thomas LeClair, DeLillo says, “Some things I’ll take right to the machine. Writing is intense concentration, and the typewriter can act as a focusing tool or memory tool. It enables me to bore in on something more strongly (14).

willing to inscribe easily revisable text. It might first appear that Wallace's choice of writing technology is Ludditic, but the pencil actually comes closer to representing the digital transition that Powers, who composes with voice dictation software, embraces.<sup>44</sup> The pencil, like the digital, is erasable. Wallace here exhibits what Jonathan Elmer describes as "the figure of man in the place of his erasure" (109).

Indeed, it is difficult to read *The Pale King* without feeling the *gravitas* of the absence behind the words. Reading the book nearly four years after Wallace's death and with the knowledge that he in no way intended it to be read at this stage makes the act of reading this unfinished novel almost voyeuristic. Much in the same way that Powers invites the reader to step inside his actual life through linguistic embodiment, Wallace here represents himself—and is represented by his editor—as a linguistic embodiment whose referent, while never literally present for the reader, still resonates as a present absence. That is, while Wallace writes that he is the "living human holding the pencil," no one read those words when it could have been true. Knowing this, as a reader, makes the narrative artifice all the more powerful.

My second example illustrates a variation on the director ontology I described in chapter two, tracing the evolution of the second-order observer from, first, witness, and then director ontology. *Fringe*, the brain child of acclaimed writer/director/producer J.J. Abrams, currently broadcasting its fourth season, follows the cases of an off-the-books branch of the FBI, which investigates crimes exhibiting elements of "fringe science." Combining the expertise of brilliant scientist Walter Bishop and his son Peter with the deductive and martial skills of Agent Olivia Dunham and her team, the narrative reveals early in Season One that these fringe events are the result of a group of people with access to technology that exceeds anything even Walter has

---

<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Powers writes, "I can write lying down. I can forget the machine is even there. I can live above the level of the phrase, thinking in full paragraphs and capturing the rhythmic arcs before they fade" ("Essay par. 15").

seen. By Season Two, it is clear that this technology comes from a parallel universe wherein nearly everyone has a doppelganger, but the different choices these alternate versions of the characters make result in a slightly altered universe. The entire series—multiple universes and all—stands witnessed not just by viewers, but also by a group of twelve men, code-named after the months of the year, known as the “Observers.” The “Observers” exist outside of time and are capable of observing all possible realities. In the most recent episode, one of the observers, September,<sup>45</sup> sacrifices his status as observer, and it seems also his life, to explain to Peter the observer’s origins and perspective, as well as his own (first, accidental and later purposeful) participation in changing the narrative. That is, the Observers’ job is to dispassionately witness important events in human history. Despite slight physiological differences, the Observers are, or were, humans—a team of scientists from the future tasked to observe not just the beginnings of human history, but all of the significant events (“The End of All Things” 4.14). In a very real way, they stand witness to the subjectivization of a species.

Not wholly unlike Wallace’s depiction of the advertising industry, September does his job a little too well. That is, he becomes so caught up in the act of observation, in the “desire to witness,” that his presence catches Walter’s attention and distracts him from making the discovery that September was there to observe (“The End of All Things” 4.14). Walter’s failure to make this discovery radically alters history, and September, feeling that he must rectify his own mistake, breaks the “rules” of the Observers by actively engaging in the world. Initially, September merely desires to do that which he is tasked to do—observe significant events, but this cathectic connection with the act of observation leads to his move beyond the role of observer to that of participating observer. Interpellated into the story by his very presence as observer, by

---

<sup>45</sup> The primary observer for events surrounding Walter, Peter, and Olivia, September appears in every single episode of *Fringe* to date, but it takes careful observation on the part of the viewer to find him in most of the episodes.

the fact that the second-order observer is always already part of that which it observes, September's observation itself becomes inscribed into the storyworld. The timeline—the story *Fringe* tells—is always already inclusive of September's observation. Indeed, the observer's mistake provides the very conditions of possibility for the narrative.

If observing creates a world, then participating in the world as observer creates many worlds, for September's 'mistake' leads to a proliferation of universes. Indeed, September makes a decision regarding what the "real" timeline is. Much like fans of the show, who argue over which universe they prefer or which universe's characters are better, September makes a judgment based on his observations. September's emotional engagement with the story results in a variation on the director model we saw in *Infinite Jest*. That is, September's "mistake" creates a multiplicity of options from which he must *choose*. He must write the text into existence, give the "real timeline" validation and authenticity by pointing Peter home, to the "real" universe, the right storyworld. The narrative is, as I have mentioned, still in progress, so I do not yet know the final outcome, but I surmise that Peter will get back to his own timeline, the "green universe" (so named because that is the color of the opening credits of this, the original-to-the-viewer timeline), and when he does, it is because an observer with an array of choices made an editorial and a directorial decision regarding what timeline—what possible reality—constitutes the "canonical" text.

While chapter three began to explore the possibilities inherent in narrative agent ontology, my final example, *Community*, a situation comedy currently airing its third season on NBC, exhibits a sort of hybrid ontology comprised of both director and narrative agent ontologies, particularly in the character "Abed." Speculatively labeled with Asperger's Syndrome, Abed establishes himself quickly as the socially awkward but lovable observer and recorder of the narra-



tive of the group. The third episode of the series features Abed's introduction to filmmaking when he enrolls in an introductory level film class. He immediately outgrows his class and begins to make increasingly sophisticated material. It becomes clear early in Season One that it is precisely his role as a prolific media consumer that makes him such a good producer of narrative. His observation, that is, translates into his creative intervention in and representation of that which he observes. "Going meta" is Abed's trademark. He consistently maps TV tropes and media-specific clichés onto each episode's narrative. For example, Season Two begins with Abed constantly referring to the events in the group's collective life as a TV show, saying he hopes "we can move away from the soapy relationshipy stuff and into bigger, fast-paced, self-contained escapades" ("Anthropology 101" 2.1), and it ends on a similar note. In the Season Two finale, Abed introduces the second episode of the two-part story by telling the Greendale students, "We've left the Western motif and are entering more of a *Star Wars* scenario" ("For a Few Paintballs More" 2.24). Abed consistently provides for viewers a sort of annotated version of the narrative of the show.

Abed's participation in the actual story of the show viewers consume is passive and minimal at first. That is, he is so concerned with observing and recording that he does not engage in the story itself (perhaps the embodiment of Wallace [via Hal's seventh grade essay] post-postmodern man of nonaction). He eventually realizes, however, that he can effect more change in his narrative by engaging in his world as he narrativizes it. It is, in other words, the *narrative* he serves, and not the events or people themselves. On his decision to engage in the narrative he is supposed to be merely observing, Abed says, "some flies are too awesome for the wall" ("Documentary Filmmaking Redux" 3.8). He goes on to explain his choice to engage in the story-world, this time to the camera (and therefore to us, the viewers): "Documentarians are supposed

to be objective to avoid having any effect on the story, and yet we have more effect than anyone because we decide to tell it, and we decide how it ends” (“Documentary Filmmaking Redux” 3.8). Abed’s decision to intervene in the story changes the terms of the story itself, something we saw in both *BSG* and *Dollhouse*, but Abed’s subjectivity is unlike both the Eight Models and Echo in that he seems to inhabit the narrative agent ontology *through* the lens of the director ontology. He changes the story to change the *story*, not, like Athena and Echo, the *world*. But by changing the story, he does, indeed, enact an epistemological engagement that leads to a similar result.

To illustrate further this hybrid director/narrative agent ontological position, I point to Abed’s more literal narrativization of the TV show. In the ninth episode of the series, the group discovers that some of Abed’s films are about them, and more than that, they are almost exact scenes that the group has lived, only Abed’s films were created prior to the events being represented. From this point on, then, we must keep in mind that that story we are watching is one that Abed has already told; he drives the show’s narrative content (“Debate 109” 1.09).<sup>46</sup> Indeed, it is arguable that Abed is the writer of the show; not only writing the episodes into existence in Season One, in Seasons Two and Three, Abed often generates the narrative trajectory of the show. For example, the Season Two Christmas episode is in claymation because, when Abed’s mother fails to come see him for their Christmas tradition of watching *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, he internalizes the rejection and sees his life in claymation; therefore, so do we (“Abed’s Uncontrollable Christmas” 2.11). And in a recent episode of Season Three, Abed observes, at the roll of a die, that Jeff is creating six possible timelines, all of which play out in the

---

<sup>46</sup> Note that the episode contains within the title the season and episode number, again underscoring the recursively “meta” aspect. The TV show is about life being like a TV show. This layering of observation, in its complex representation of TV-inflected consciousness, troubles the distinction Wallace draws between TV as an escape from what it feels like to live and fiction as *about* what it feels like to live.

episode itself (“Remedial Chaos Theory” 3.4). Abed’s interior becomes the narrative output. Abed, in Luhmannesque fashion, removes his subjectivity and replaces it with a participating observer ontology, and we, as viewers, see through Abed’s narrative eyes.

Perhaps the fullest representation of Abed as simultaneously re-inscribed observer and narrative agent occurs in Season Two, when Shirley, the “devout Christian” of the group, asks Abed to make a film about Jesus that she could put up on YouTube . Abed agrees to do it, but he soon moves beyond the story of Jesus to tell a story about a filmmaker making a film about Jesus. Titled *Abed*, the movie is a narcissistic fantasy, wherein the filmmaker turns out to be Jesus, and his camera, God. Abed explains the premise to Shirley with a diagram, which later becomes the movie poster, of an endless recursive spiral made up of the mirroring of God and Jesus, camera and filmmaker.<sup>47</sup> Abed, having ascended, if only momentarily, to the mystical unity of being observer, witness, director, and narrative agent simultaneously, declares, “I am watched as I am watching; I am audience and creation [. . .] There are no takes. There is no viewer. The film is the story; the story is us. We are the film” (“Messianic Myths and Ancient Peoples” 2.5) This statement prompts a question from his enraptured audience regarding whether they are all in the movie now. Abed replies, “We are all in *a* movie. Even when there are no cameras.” Always watching and watched, observing and observed, Abed contends, we live our lives *as if* they were a movie. While Abed renounces his narcissistic film at the end of the episode, I argue that his (brief) ascendance here is a metaphorical representation of what Abed already is to the story-world of the show—its creator, its content, and, most importantly, its viewer. Abed is an embodiment of viewer agency, and the implicit argument is that, as viewers, we create worlds. We observe, and because of that observation, storyworlds proliferate.

---

<sup>47</sup> The tagline on the poster is “the story of the story is the story.”

Obviously, all of these examples deserve far more attention than I can give them here, and I knowingly open up avenues of inquiry that I cannot yet pursue. I gesture towards them in order to make clear how prevalent these trends are in current literary and televisual production and to suggest that we need to examine more closely the role of second-order observation, articulating the ways in which marking distinctions, telling stories, and becoming as subjects are deeply and inextricably bound.

## WORKS CITED

- “Abed’s Uncontrollable Christmas.” Writ. Dima Stamatopolous and Dan Harmon. Dir. Duke Johnson. *Community*. Season Two, Episode Eleven. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011. DVD.
- Adams, Jon. “The Sufficiency of Code: *Galatea 2.2* and the Necessity of Embodiment.” *Intersections: Essays on Richard Powers*. Ed. Stephen J. Burn and Peter Dempsey. Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008. Print.
- “Abed’s Uncontrollable Christmas.” Writ. Dima Stamatopolous and Dan Harmon. Dir. Duke Johnson. Season Two, Episode Eleven. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011. DVD.
- “Anthropology 101.” Writ. Chris McKenna. Dir. Joe Russo. *Community*. Season Two, Episode One. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011. DVD.
- “The Attic.” Writ. Maurissa Tancharen and Jed Whedon. Dir. John Cassaday. *Dollhouse*. Season Two, Episode Ten. Fox Broadcasting Company. 18 Dec. 2009. Television.
- Arp, Robert and Tracie Mahaffey. “‘And They Have a Plan’: Cylons As Persons.” *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy*. Ed. Jason T. Eberl. *The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series*. Ed. William Irwin. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008. 55-63. Print.
- Badmington, Neil. “Pod almighty!; or, humanism, posthumanism, and the strange case of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.” *Textual Practice* 15.1 (2001): 5-22. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 15 June 2009.
- , ed. *Posthumanism. Readers in Cultural Criticism*. Series Ed. Catherine Belsey. New York: Palgrave, 2000. Print.
- . “Theorizing Posthumanism.” *Cultural Critique* 53 (Winter 2003), 10-27. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 15 June 2009.

Bal, Mieke. *Narratology*. 2nd ed. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999. Print.

Barth, John. *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Nonfiction*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1984. Print.

---. *Further Fridays: Essays, Lectures, and other Nonfiction, 1984-1994*. Boston: Little Brown, and Co, 1995. Print.

---. *Giles Goat-Boy or, The Revised New Syllabus* (1966). New York: Bantam, 1981. Print.

---. *Letters: A Novel*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1979. Print.

"Battlestar Wiki." *n/d*. Web. 12 Jan. 2012.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976). Trans. Iain Hamilton Grant. London: Sage, 1993. Print.

Begley, Adam. "The art of Fiction CXXXV: Don DeLillo." (1993) *Conversations with Don DeLillo*. Ed, Thomas DePietro. *Literary Conversations Series*. Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, series Ed. Jackson, MS: U of Mississippi P, 2005. 86-108. Print.

Bendle, Mervyn F. "Teleportation, Cyborgs and the Posthuman Ideology." *Social Semiotics* 12.1 (2002): 45-62. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.

---. "Pod almighty!; or, humanism, posthumanism, and the strange case of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*." *Textual Practice* 15.1 (2001), 5-22. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Blasinghame, Katrina. "I Can't Believe I'm Saying it Twice in the Same Century. . .But "Duh"": The Evolution of Buffy the Vampire Slayer Subculture Language Through the Medium

of Fanfiction.” *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 5.4 [20] (2006): 34 pars. Web.

Booth, Paul. “Frak-tured Postmodern Lives, Or, How I Found Out I Was a Cylon.” *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy: Mission Accomplished or Mission Frakked Up?* Ed. Josef Steiff and Tristan D. Tamplin. *Popular Culture and Philosophy Series*, vol 33. Chicago: Open Court, 2008. 17-27. Print.

Boswell, Marshall. *Understanding David Foster Wallace. Understanding Contemporary American Literature*. Matthew J. Buccoli, ed. Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 2003. Print.

Bould, Mark and Sherryl Vint. “Of Neural Nets and Brains in Vats: Model Subjects in *Galatea 2.2* and *Plus*.” *Biography* 30.1 (Winter 2007): 84-104. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.

Bowen, Zack. *A Reader's Guide to John Barth*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994. Print.

---. "Barth and Joyce." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 37.4 (1996): 261-269. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.

Boxall, Peter. “DeLillo and Media Culture.” *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*. Ed. John N. Duvall. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. 43-52. Print.

Brannon, Julie Sloan. “‘It’s About Power’: Buffy, Foucault, and the Quest for the Self.” *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 6.4 (2007): 14 pars. Web.

Bresnan, Mark. "The Work of Play in David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 50.1 (2008): 51-68. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.

“Briar Rose.” Writ. Jane Espenson. Dir. Dwight Little. Joss Whedon’s *Dollhouse*: Season One. Episode Eleven. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2009. DVD.

Bronfen, Elisabeth and Benjamin Marius Schmidt. “Psychoanalysis and Systems Theory.” *The Germanic Review* 74.1 (1999): 3-13. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 9 Apr. 2011.

Buonanno, Milly. *The Age of Television: Experiences and Theories*. Trans. Jennifer Radice. Bristol, UK: intellect, 2008. Print.

Burn, Stephen J. and Peter Dempsey. *Intersections: Essays on Richard Powers*. Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008. Print.

Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997. Print.

Campbell, Miranda. “Probing the Posthuman: Richard Powers’ *Galatea* 2.2 and the Mind-Body Problem.” *Reconstruction* 4.3 (Summer 2004). 27 par. Web.

Carlisle, Greg. “Introduction: Consider David Foster Wallace.” *Consider David Foster Wallace*. Hering. 12-23. Print.

Cioffi, Frank Louis. “‘An Anguish Become Thing’: Narrative as Performance in David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*.” *Narrative* 8.2 (2000): 161-181. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.

Clarke, Bruce. *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Systems*. New York: Fordham UP, 2008. Print.

Clavier, Berndt. *John Barth and Postmodernism: Spatiality, Travel, Montage*. *Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature* vol. 83. Horst S. Daemmrich, ed. New York: Peter Lang, 2007. Print.



“Daybreak: Part 2.” *Battlestar Galactica Season 4.5*. Writ. Ronald D. Moore. Dir. Michael Rymer. Universal Studios, 2010. Blu-Ray.

“Debate 109.” Writ. Tim Hobert. Dir. Joe Russo. *Community*. Season One, Episode Nine. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2010. DVD.

DeLillo, Don. *Underworld*. New York: Scribner, 1997. Print.

---. *White Noise* (1985). New York: Penguin, 1999. Print.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980). Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis, The U of Minnesota P, 1987. Print.

Dewey, Joseph, Steven G. Kellman, and Irving Malin. *UnderWords: Perspectives on Don DeLillo's Underworld*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2002. Print.

“Documentary Filmmaking: Redux.” Writ. Megan Ganz. Dir. Joe Russo. *Community*. Season Three, Episode Eight. NBC. 17 Nov 2011. Television.

“Doppelganger.” Writ. Daniel Arkin. Dir. Ken Olin. *Alias*. Season One. Episode Five. Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2003. DVD.

“Doppelgangland.” Writ. and dir. Joss Whedon. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Chosen Collection*. Season Three, Episode Sixteen. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005. DVD.

“Double Agent.” Writ. Alex Jurtzman and Roberto Orci. Dir. Ken Olin. *Alias*. Season Two. Episode Fourteen. Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2003. DVD.

Dunn, George A. “Being Boomer: Identity, Alienation, and Evil.” *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy*. Ed. Jason T. Eberl. *The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series*. Ed. William Irwin. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008. 127-40. Print.

- Duvall, John. "The (Super)Marketplace of Images: Television as Unmediated Mediation in DeLillo's *White Noise*." *Don DeLillo's White Noise. Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations*. Ed. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003. Print. 169-94.
- Eakin, Paul John. "Narrative Identity and Narrative Imperialism: A Response to Galen Strawson and James Phelan." *Narrative* 14.2 (May 2006). 180-87. Print.
- Eberl, Jason T., ed. *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy. The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series*. Ed. William Irwin. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008. Print.
- Eckstein, Lars and Christophi Reinfandt. "The Parody of 'Parody as Cultural memory in Richard Powers's *Galatea 2.2*': A response to Anca Rosu." *Connotations* 13.1-2 (2003/2004): 139-54. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 9 Apr. 2011.
- Ellis, John. *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2000.
- Elmer, Jonathan. "Blinded Me with Science: Motifs of Observation and Temporality in Lacan and Luhmann." *Cultural Critique* 30.1 (Spring 1995): 101-36. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 9 Apr. 2011.
- "Epitaph One." Teleplay Maurissa Tancharoen and Jed Whedon; story Joss Whedon. Dir. David Solomon. *Joss Whedon's Dollhouse: Season One*. Unaired episode. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2009. DVD.
- "Epitaph Two: Return." Writ. Maurissa Tancharoen, Jed Whedon, and Andrew Chambliss. Dir. David Solomon. *Dollhouse*. Season Two. Episode Thirteen. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2010. DVD.
- "The End of All Things." Writ. David Fury. Dir. Jeff Hunt. *Fringe*. Season Four, Episode Fourteen Fox broadcasting Company. 24 Feb. 2012. Television.

Erdinast-Vulcan, Daphna. "The *I* that Tells Itself: A Bakhtinian Perspective on Narrative Identity." *Narrative* 16.1 (2008). 1-15. Print.

Fiske, John. *Television Culture* (1987). London: Routledge, 2011. Print.

Fitzpatrick, Kathleen. *The Anxiety of Obsolescence: The American Novel in the Age of Television*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2006. Print.

---. "The Exhaustion of Literature: Novels, Computers, and the Threat of Obsolescence." *Contemporary Literature* 43.3 (2002): 518-559. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.

Fludernik, Monika. "Narratology in the Twenty-First Century: The Cognitive Approach to Narrative." *PMLA* 125.4 (October 2010). 924-30. Print.

Fogel, Stan and Gordon Slethaug. *Understanding John Barth*. Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 1990. Print.

"For a Few Paintballs More." Writ. Hilary Winston. Dir. Joe Russo. Season Two, Episode One. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011. DVD.

Freud, Sigmund. "Further Recommendations in the technique of Psychoanalysis: Recollection, Repetition and Working Through" (1914). *Freud: Therapy and Technique. Essays on Dream Interpretation, Hypnosis, Transference, Free Association, and Other Techniques of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Philip Rieff. Collier Books Edition of *The Collected Papers of Sigmund Freud*. New York: Collier Books, 1963.

"Getting Closer." Writ. and dir. Tim Minear. *Dollhouse*. Season Two, Episode Eleven. Fox Broadcasting Company. 8 Jan. 2010. Television.

- Georgakopoulou, Alexandra. "Thinking big with small stories in narrative and identity analysis." *Narrative Inquiry* 16.1 (2006). 122-30. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.
- Giles, Paul. "Sentimental Posthumanism: David Foster Wallace." *Twentieth Century Literature* 53.3 (Fall 2007): 327-44. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 16 Jul. 2011.
- Glick, Ira and Sidney J. Levy. *Living With Television* (1962). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005. Print.
- Goerlandt, Iannis. "'Put the Book Down and Slowly Walk Away': Irony and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*." *Critique* 47.3(Spring 2006). 309-328. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.
- Goldberg, Matt. "Interview: Joss Whedon—Dollhouse." Collider Entertainment. <http://collider.com/entertainment/article.asp/aid/10819/cid/13/tcid/1>. Web.
- Gray, Jonathan. *Television Entertainment*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Gray, Jonathan, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, ed. *Fandom : Identities And Communities In A Mediated World*. Ed. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, And C. Lee Harrington New York : New York UP, 2007. Print.
- Green, Jeremy. "Disaster Footage: Spectacles of Violence in DeLillo's Fiction." *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.3 (1999). 571-99. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 26 Aug. 2011.
- . *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.

- Greiner, Donald J. "Don DeLillo, John Updike, and the Sustaining Power of Myth." *Under-  
Words: Perspectives on Don DeLillo's Underworld*. Ed. Joseph Dewey, Steven G. Kell-  
man, and Irving Malin. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2002. 103-113. Print.
- Halfyard, Janet K. "Love, Death, Curses and Reverses (in F Minor): Music, Gender, and Identity  
in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*. *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buf-  
fy Studies*. 1.4 [4] (2001): 21 pars. Web.
- Halldorson, Stephanie. *The Hero in Contemporary American Fiction. American Literature  
Readings in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Linda Wagner-Martin, Series ed. New York: Palgrave  
Macmillan, 2007. Print.
- Harris, Charles B. "George's Illumination: Unity in Giles Goat-Boy." *Studies in the Novel* 8  
(1976): 172-184. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.
- . *Passionate Virtuosity: The Fiction of John Barth*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1983. Print.
- "Haunted. Writ. Jane Espenson, Maurissa Tancharoen, and Jed Whedon. Dir. Elodie Keene. *Joss  
Whedon's Dollhouse: Season One*. Episode Ten. Twentieth Century Fox Home Enter-  
tainment, 2009. DVD.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature,  
and Informatics*. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1999. Print.
- . "The Illusion of Autonomy and the Fact of Recursivity: Virtual Ecologies, Entertainment,  
and *Infinite Jest*." *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 30.3  
(1999): 675-697. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.
- . "Making the Cut: The Interplay of Narrative and System, or What Systems Theory Can't  
See." *Cultural Critique* 30.1 (Spring 1995): 71-100. *MLA International Bibliography*.  
EBSCO. Web. 9 Apr. 2011.

- Hering, David. *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essays*. Los Angeles: Sideshow Media, 2009. Print.
- . "Infinite Jest: Triangles, Cycles, Choices, and Chases." *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essays*. Hering. 89-100. Print.
- Herman, David, ed. *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 1999. Print.
- . *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 2002. Print.
- . ed. *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*. Stanford, CA: CSLI, 2003. Print.
- Holland, Mary K. "'The Art's Heart's Purpose': Braving the Narcissistic Loop of David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 47.3 (2006): 218-242. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.
- "Home: Part 2." *Battlestar Galactica Season 2.0*. Writ. David Eick and Ronald D. Moore. Dir. Jeff Woolnough. Universal Studios, 2005. DVD.
- Hu Pegues, Juliana. "Miss Cylon: Empire and Adoption in *Battlestar Galactica*." *MELUS (Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States)* 33.4 (Winter 2008). 189-209. Print.
- Hurt, James. "Narrative Powers: Richard Powers as Storyteller." *Review of Contemporary Fiction*. 18.3 (Fall 1998): 24-41. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 15 June 2009.
- "Instinct." Writ. Michele Fazekas and Tara Butters. Dir. Marita Grabiak. *Joss Whedon's Dollhouse: The Complete Season Two*. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2009. Blu-Ray.

- Jacobs, Timothy. "The Brothers Incandenza: Translating Ideology in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 49.3 (2007): 265-292. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.
- Jenkins, Henry. "The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence." *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. 7.1 (2004): 33-43. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.
- Johnson, Gary. "Consciousness as Content: Neuronarratives and the Redemption of Fiction" *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*. 41.1 (Mar 2008), 169-185. *Literature Online*. <http://lionreference.chadwyck.com>. Web. 15 Jun 2009.
- Johnston, John. "Generic Difficulties in the Novels of Don DeLillo." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 30.4 (1989): 261-275. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.
- Kafalenos, Emma. "Not (Yet) Knowing: Epistemological Effects of Deferred and Suppressed Information in Narrative." *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*. Ed. David Herman. *Theory and Interpretation Of Narrative Series*. Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 1999. Print.
- Kind, Amy. "'I'm Sharon, But I'm a Different Sharon': The Identity of Cylons." *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy*. Ed. Jason T. Eberl. *The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series*. Ed. William Irwin. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008. 64-74. Print.
- Kociemba, David. "'Over-identify Much?': Passion, 'Passion,' and the Author-Audience Feedback Loop in Buffy the Vampire Slayer." *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 5.3 [19] (2006): 39 pars. Web.

“Kobol’s Last Gleaming: Part 1.” *Battlestar Galactica Season 1*. Writ. David Eick and Ronald D. Moore. Dir. Michael Rymer. Universal Studios, 2005. DVD.

“Kobol’s Last Gleaming: Part 2.” *Battlestar Galactica Season 1*. Writ. David Eick and Ronald D. Moore. Dir. Michael Rymer. Universal Studios, 2005. DVD.

Koontz, K. Dale. “Czech Mate: Whedon, Čapcek, and the Foundations of the *Dollhouse*.” *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 8.2/3 [30/31] (2010): 24 pars. Web.

Kraus, Wolfgang. “The narrative negotiation of identity and belonging.” *Narrative Inquiry* 16.1 (2006). 103-11. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.

Kucharzewski, Jan. “‘From Language to Life is Just Four Letters’: Self-Referentiality vs. the Reference of Self in Richard Powers’s *Galatea 2.2*.” *Amerikastudien* 53.2 (2008): 171-87. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 11 Apr. 2011.

Lacan, Jacques. “On a Question Prior to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis” (1958). *Écrits*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: London, 2006. Print.

Laist, Randy. *Technology and Postmodern Subjectivity in Don DeLillo’s Novels. Modern American Literature: New Approaches* vol. 52. Yoshinobu Hakutani, ed. New York: Peter Lang, 2010. Print.

LeClair, Thomas. “An Interview with Don DeLillo” (1982). *Conversations with Don DeLillo*. Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 2005. 3-15. Print.

Lentricchia, Frank. “Tales of the Electronic Tribe.” *Don DeLillo’s White Noise. Bloom’s Modern Critical Interpretations*. Ed, Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003. Print. 73-95.



Lindner, April. "Narrative as Necessary Evil in Richard Powers's *Operation Wandering Soul*."

*Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 38.1 (Fall 1996): 68-79. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 15 June 2009.

Lindsay, Alan. *Death in the FUNhouse: John Barth and Poststructuralist Aesthetics*. *Studies in Literary Criticism and Theory* vol. 2. Ed. Hans Rudnick. New York: Peter Lang, 1995. Print.

Lipsky, David. *Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself: A Road Trip with David Foster Wallace*. New York: Broadway Books, 2010. Print.

Liotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979). Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. *Theory and History of Literature* vol 10. Ed. Wald Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1985. Print.

Luhmann, Niklas. "The Paradox of Observing Systems." *Cultural Critique* 31.2 (Autumn 1995): 37-55. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 9 Apr. 2011.

---. *Social Systems* (1984). Trans. John Bednarz, Jr. and Dirk Baecker. *Writing Science Series*. Ed. Timothy Lenoir and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995. Print.

---. "Why Does Society Describe Itself as Postmodern?" *Cultural Critique* 30.1 (Spring 1995): 171-86. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 9 Apr. 2011.

McCaffery, Larry. "An Interview with David Foster Wallace." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13.2 (1993): 127-150. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 16 July 2011.

McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009. Print.

"Messianic Myths and Ancient Peoples." Writ. Andrew Guest. Dir. Tristram Shapeero. *Community*. Season Two, Episode Five. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011. DVD.

- Mexal, Stephen J. "SpectacularSpectacular!: *Underworld* and the Production of Terror." *Studies in the Novel* 36.3 (Fall 2004): 318-35. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.
- Miller, D. Quentin. "Deeper Blues, or the Posthuman Prometheus: Cybernetic Renewal and the Late-Twentieth-Century American Novel." *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 77.2 (2005): 379-407. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.
- Milsky, Daniel. "The Narrative Disruptions of Model Eight." *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy: Mission Accomplished or Mission Frakked Up?* Ed. Josef Steiff and Tristan D. Tamplin. *Popular Culture and Philosophy Series*, vol 33. Chicago: Open Court, 2008. Print. 3-15.
- Moore, Robert W. "'To Be a Person': Sharon Agathon and the Social Expression of Individuality." *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*. Ed. Tiffany Potter and C.W. Marshall. New York: Continuum, 2008. 105-17. Print.
- Moore, Ronald D. (Producer). (2004-10). *Battlestar Galactica* [Television series]. Hollywood: Universal Studios.
- . "Stop today, I want to get off." *Ronald D. Moore: Blog*. 20 Mar. 2009. Web. 2 March 2012.
- Moraru, Christian. *Memorious Discourse: Reprise and Representation in Postmodernism*. Madison: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 2005. Print.
- Morrell, David. *John Barth: An Introduction*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1976. Print.
- Neilson, Jim. "An Interview with Richard Powers." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 18.3 (1998): 13-23. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 27 Jan. 2011.

Nichols, Catherine. "Dialogizing Postmodern Carnival: David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest."

*Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 43.1 (2001): 3-16. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.

"No Exit." *Battlestar Galactica Season 4.5*. Writ. Ryan Mottesheard. Dir. Gwyneth Horder-Payton. Universal Studios, 2010. Blu-Ray.

Noone, Kristin. "Rossum's Universal Robots." *Inside Joss Whedon's Dollhouse: From Alpha to Rossum*. Ed. Jane Espenson. Dallas, TX: Benbella Books, 2010. 21-32. Print.

"Omega." Writ. and dir. Tim Minear. *Joss Whedon's Dollhouse: Season One*. Episode Twelve. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2009. DVD.

Ort, Nina. "Systems Theory with Lacan." Trans. Benjamin M. Schmidt. *The Germanic Review* 74.1 (1999): 30-47. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 9 Apr. 2011.

Osteen, Mark. *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture*. *Penn Studies in Contemporary American Fiction*. Ed. Emory Elliot. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2000. Print.

Pearse, James A. "Beyond the Narrational Frame: Interpretation and Metafiction." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 73-84. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.

Peters, Mark. "Getting a Wiggins and Being a Bitca: How Two Items of Slayer Slang Survive on the Television Without Pity Message Boards." *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 5.4 [20] (2006): 27 pars. Web.

Phelan, James. "Narratives in Contest; Or, Another Twist In The Narrative Turn." *PMLA: Publications of The Modern Language Association Of America* 123.1 (2008): 166-175. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 29 Feb. 2011.

- The Plan*. Writ. Jane Espenson. Dir. Edward James Olmos. Universal Studios, 2010. Blu-Ray.
- Potter, Tiffany and C.W. Marshall, eds. *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*. New York: Continuum, 2008. Print.
- Powers, Richard. *The Echo Maker*. New York: Picador, 2006. Print.
- . "Essay: How to Speak a Book." *The New York Times*. 7 Jan. 2007. Web. 3 Mar. 2012.
- . *Galatea 2.2* New York: Picador, 1995. Print.
- . "Making the Rounds." *Intersections: Essays on Richard Powers*. Ed. Stephen J. Burn and Peter Dempsey. Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008.
- Punday, Daniel. *Five Strands of Fictionality: The Institutional Construction of Contemporary American Fiction*. Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2010.
- . "John Barth's Occasional Writing: The Institutional Construction of Postmodernism in the Friday Book." *American Literature* 77.3 (2005): 591-619. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.
- Rabb, J. Douglas and J. Michael Richardson. "Myth, Metaphor, Morality and Monsters: The Espenson Factor and Cognitive Science in Joss Whedon's Love Ethic." *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 7.4 [28] (2009): 30 pars. Web.
- "Rapture." *Battlestar Galactica Season 3*. Writ. Bradley Thompson and David Weddle. Dir. Michael Rymer. Universal Studios, 2008. DVD.
- Rasmussen, Frederick N. "Whatever Happened to . . . Novelist John Barth?" *The Baltimore Sun*. 2 Dec 2006. Web. 3 Mar. 2012.
- "Razor." *Battlestar Galactica Season 4.0*. Writ. Michael Taylor. Dir. Félix Enríquez Alcalá. Universal Studios, 2009. DVD.

- Redman, Peter. "The narrative formation of identity revisited: Narrative construction, agency and the unconscious." *Narrative Inquiry* 15.1 (2005). 25-44. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.
- "Remedial Chaos Theory." Writ. Chris McKenna. Dir. Jeff Melman. *Community*. Season Three, Episode Four. NBC. 13 Oct. 2011. Television.
- Reilly, Charlie. "An Interview with JOHN BARTH." *Contemporary Literature* 41.4 (2000): 588-617. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.
- "The Replacement." Writ. Marti Noxon. Dir. David Greenwalt. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Chosen Collection*. Season Five, Episode Three. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005. DVD.
- "Resistance." *Battlestar Galactica Season 2.0*. Writ. Toni Graphia. Dir. Alan Kroeker. Universal Studios, 2005. DVD.
- Rosu, Anca. "Parody as Cultural Memory in Richard Powers's *Galatea 2.2*." *Connotations* 12.2-3 (2002): 139-54. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 11 Apr. 2011.
- Ryan, Marie-Laure. *Avatars of Story. Electronic Mediations* Vol. 17. Minneapolis: U. Of Minnesota P, 2006. Print.
- Scholz, Carter. "Narrating Technology." *Intersections: Essays on Richard Powers*. Ed. Stephen J. Burn and Peter Dempsey. Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008. 292-304. Print.
- Schulz, Max F. *The Muses of John Barth*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1990. Print.
- Schwanitz, Dietrich. "Systems Theory and the Difference between Communication and Consciousness: An Introduction to a Problem and its Context." *MLN* 111.3 (April 1996): 488-505. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 9 Apr. 2011.

- Scott, Steven D. *The Gamefulness of American Postmodernism: John Barth and Louise Erdrich. Studies in Literary Theory vol.10*. Hans H. Rudnick, Series ed. New York: Peter Lang, 2000. Print.
- Seaman, Myra J. "Becoming More (than) Human: Affective Posthumanisms, Past and Future." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 37.2 (Summer 2007), 246-75. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.
- Seidl, Chris. "Resurrecting God: The Reactionary Politics of *Battlestar Galactica*." PCA/ACA, St. Louis, MO, 2010. Unpublished Paper.
- Silva, Matt. "The 'Powers' to 'Kraft' Humanist Endings to Posthumanist Novels: Galatea 2.2 as a Rewriting of Operation Wandering Soul." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 50.2 (2009): 208-222. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011
- "Six of One." *Battlestar Galactica Season 4.0*. Writ. Michael Angeli. Dir. Anthony Hemingway. Universal Studios, 2009. DVD.
- Snyder, Emery. "Is Freud's Model of the Mind Autopoietic?" *The Germanic Review* 74.1 (1999): 3-13. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 9 Apr. 2011.
- Snyder, Sharon. "The Gender of Genius: Scientific Experts and Literary Amateurs in the Fiction of Richard Powers." *Review of Contemporary Fiction*. 18.3 (Fall 1998): 84-96. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 15 June 2009.
- Spector-Mersel, Gabriela. "Narrative Research: Time for a New Paradigm." *Narrative Inquiry* 20.1 (2010). 204-24. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.
- Spicer, Arwen. "'It's Bloody Brilliant!' The Undermining of Metanarrative Feminism in the Season Seven Arc Narrative of Buffy." *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 4.3 [15] (2004): 32 pars. Web.

- St. Louis, Renee and Miriam Riggs. “ ‘A Painful Bleeding Sleep’: Sleeping Beauty in the Doll-house.” *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 8.2/3 [30/31] (2010): 30 pars. Web.
- Steiff, Josef and Tristan D. Tamplin, eds. *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy: Mission Accomplished or Mission Frakked Up? Popular Culture and Philosophy Series*, vol 33. Chicago: Open Court, 2008.
- Strawson, Galen. “Against Narrativity.” *Ratio* XVII.4 (December 2004). 428-52. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.
- Strecker, Trey. “Ecologies of Knowledge: The Encyclopedic Narratives of Richard Powers and His Contemporaries.” *Review of Contemporary Fiction*. 18.3 (Fall 1998): 67-71. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 15 June 2009.
- Tabbi, Joseph. *Cognitive Fictions. Electronic Mediations Series*. Ed. Katherine Hayles, Mark Poster, and Samuel Weber. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2002. Print.
- Tabron, Judith. “Girl on Girl Politics: Willow/Tara and New Approaches to Media Fandom.” *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 4.1-2 [13-14] (2004): 79 pars. Web.
- Taylor, Stephanie. “Self-narration as rehearsal: A discursive approach to the narrative formation of identity.” *Narrative Inquiry* 15.1 (2005). 45-50. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.
- Tharpe, Jac. *John Barth: The Comic Sublimity of Paradox. Crosscurrents/Modern Critiques*. Henry T. Moore, ed. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1974. Print.

"This Year's Girl." Writ. Doug Petrie. Dir. Michael Gershman. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Chosen Collection*. Season Four, Episode Fifteen. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005. DVD.

Tobin, Patricia. *John Barth and the Anxiety of Continuance*. *Penn Studies in Contemporary American Fiction Series*. Ed. Emory Elliott. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1992. Print.

"Vows." Writ. and dir. Joss Whedon. *Joss Whedon's Dollhouse: The Complete Season Two*. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2009. Blu-Ray.

Waldmeir, Joseph J. *Critical Essays on John Barth*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1980. Print.

Walkiewicz, E.P. *John Barth*. *Twayne's United States Authors Series*. Warren French, ed. Boston: Twayne, 1986. Print.

Wallace, David Foster. "E Unibus Pluram: Television And U.S. Fiction." *Review Of Contemporary Fiction* 13.2 (1993): 151. *Literary Reference Center*. Web. 4 June 2011.

---. *Infinite Jest*. New York: Back Bay Books, 1996. Print.

---. *The Pale King*. New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2011. Print.

Walter, James. "A Psychronology of Lust in the Menippean Tradition: *Giles Goat-Boy*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 21.4 (1975): 394-410. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.

"Welcome to the Dollhouse: Meet the Anti-Buffy." *All Things Considered*. NPR. 8 Feb. 2009. Web. 15 Jan 2012.

Wilcox, Rhonda. "Echoes of Complicity: Reflexivity and Identity in Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse*." *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 8.2/3 [30/31] (2010): 21 pars. Web.



- . "'Let It Simmer': Tone in 'Pangs.'" *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 9.1 [33] (Spring 2011): 27 pars. Web.
- Wilcox, Leonard. "Baudrillard, DeLillo's *White Noise*, and the End of Heroic Narrative." *Don DeLillo's White Noise. Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations*. Ed, Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003. Print. 97-115.
- Willems, Brian. "When the Non-Human Knows Its Own Death." *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy*. Ed. Jason T. Eberl. *The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series*. Ed. William Irwin. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008. 87-98.
- Williams, Rebecca. "'It's About Power': Spoilers and Fan Hierarchy in Online Buffy Fandom." *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 3.3-4 [11-12] (2004): 42 pars. Web.
- "The Wish." Writ. Jane Espenson. Dir. James A. Contner. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Chosen Collection*. Season Three, Episode Nine. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005. DVD.
- "Who Are You." Writ and dir. Joss Whedon. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Chosen Collection*. Season Four, Episode Sixteen. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005. DVD.
- Worthington, Marjorie. "The Texts of Tech: Technology and Authorial Control in *Geek Love* and *Galatea 2.2*." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 39.1 (Winter 2009): 109-32. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 11 Apr. 2011.
- Yehnert, Curtis A. "'Like Some Endless Sky Waking Inside': Subjectivity in Don DeLillo." *Critique* 42.4 (Summer 2001): 357-66. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jun. 2011.

- Yetter, David. "Subjectifying the Objective: *Underworld* as Mutable Narrative." *UnderWords: Perspectives on Don DeLillo's Underworld*. Ed. Joseph Dewey, Steven G. Kellman, and Irving Malin. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2002. 28-36. Print.
- Young, Kay and Jeffrey L. Saver. "The Neurology of Narrative." *SubStance* 94/95 (2001). 72-84. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989. Print.